

Alpha's Abandoned Daughter is the Secret Heiress! - Chapter 451[845 words]

(Author's POV)

Gideon said nothing.

Theron opened his mouth again, desperate for an answer, and then caught Victor's eyes.

The look on Victor's face was pure, barely-contained fury.

Theron shut his mouth immediately.

He pressed back against the seat, mind racing. He had been in a private clinic. Victor had arranged everything – a quiet exit, a route out of the territory, a clean disappearance before anyone could ask questions.

And now he was here.

In his father's car.

Moving through the streets of Northgate City with the rest of the convoy, as if nothing had happened.

Victor's fists were clenched so hard his knuckles had gone white.

Gideon turned his head slightly.

"Theodore arranged this," the Alpha King said. His voice was measured, but it held no warmth. "He told me that as long as all of you are in this car, I will be fine."

Garrett stared at him.

He couldn't tell if Gideon was cooperating with Theodore's plan playing along to force a confession out of them or if the old man genuinely didn't know the car had been compromised.

Either way, neither option was reassuring.

Victor's breath came out slow and controlled through his nose.

He knew exactly what Mason had done to this car. He had known for days. He had even added his own layer to the plan – a hired driver, a heavy truck, ready to intercept the convoy at the right moment and ensure the job was finished.

But he was supposed to be watching from a safe distance.

Not sitting inside the target.

His eyes flicked to the rear window.

The convoy stretched behind them, escort cars moving in tight formation.

Victor scanned the surrounding vehicles.

His stomach dropped.

He looked forward again and kept his face completely blank.

“Sir,” the driver said suddenly.

His voice had changed.

“Sir, I something is wrong with the brakes.”

Theron’s head snapped up.

“What?”

“The brakes.” The driver’s face had gone the color of old paper. His foot was pressing down, hard, and the car was not slowing. “They’re not – I can’t the car isn’t responding.”

“That’s impossible,” Theron said, his voice already climbing. “This car was serviced yesterday. The maintenance team signed off on everything-”

“I know.” The driver’s voice cracked. “I know, sir, but the brakes are gone. There’s nothing there. The car is completely-”

He hit the pedal again. Full force.

Nothing.

The car kept moving, smooth and steady and utterly indifferent to anything the driver did.

Theron turned to his father with wide, frightened eyes.

“Father, what do we do?”

Gideon’s expression had gone very still.

He straightened in his seat and said, with forced calm, "Contact the escort vehicles. Get them to box us in and force the car to a stop."

The driver reached for the communications panel.

His face fell.

"It's dead," he said. "The whole system – it's not working. I can't reach anyone."

The silence that followed was absolute.

Theron made a sound that was almost a whimper.

"Call Theodore," he said, voice shaking. "Father, call Theodore right now-"

"I don't have my phone," Gideon said flatly.

Garrett had already checked the speedometer.

Sixty-eight miles per hour. Still climbing slowly.

Not fatal at this speed, if they hit something solid. Painful. Possibly survivable.

But Victor still had his contingency plan out there somewhere, and Garrett had no way of knowing when or where it would appear.

He looked at Victor.

Victor was staring straight ahead.

His expression gave nothing away, but Garrett had known Victor long enough to read the tension in his shoulders.

He's scared.

Whatever Victor had arranged, it was close.

The convoy reached the intersection.

The traffic light ahead turned red.

The escort cars slowed, one by one, pulling to a stop in the intersection.

The driver of Gideon's car swore under his breath and wrenched the steering wheel hard to the right.

There was no other option.

Behind the wheel, Amelia held the car steady with both hands, her focus absolute, keeping the two vehicles running parallel with less than two feet between them.

The driver of Gideon's car rolled his window down.

"The brakes!" he shouted over the wind. "The brakes are completely gone, I can't stop the cart

Theodore leaned closer to the open window, reading the situation in seconds.

Amelia adjusted her grip and eased their car closer, narrowing the gap until the two vehicles were almost touching.

Theodore was already forming a response when his phone buzzed in his pocket.

He glanced at the screen.

Jasper.

He answered immediately and put it on speaker.

Jasper's voice came through broken and urgent, thick with something that sounded like guilt.

"Theodore. I'm sorry. I should have told you sooner. I should have-" A sharp breath. "Mason has been planning this for years. He believes Gideon is responsible for my mother's death. He's been waiting for the right moment."

"I know," Theodore said, his voice even. "I'm working on stopping the car now."

"Theodore." Jasper's voice dropped. "Listen to me. It's not just the brakes."

The air in the car shifted.

Amelia's eyes moved to Theodore.

Theodore's expression didn't change, but something in his stillness became absolute.

"Mason didn't only cut the brake line," Jasper said.

A pause.

One second.

Two.

“He put a bomb on the car.”

The words landed like a stone dropped into still water.

“It’s on the undercarriage. Someone has a detonator. If they press it-”

Jasper’s voice fractured.

“Theodore, if anyone presses that button, the car is gone. Everyone inside it is gone.”

Alpha’s Abandoned Daughter is the Secret Heiress! - Chapter 452[1,252 words]

(Author’s POV)

Theodore’s phone was still on speaker.

Jasper’s words hung in the air like smoke.

He put a bomb on the car.

Inside Gideon’s vehicle, every face went white.

Theron pressed himself against the seat back, mouth open, no sound coming out.

Victor stared straight ahead, jaw locked, the color draining from his face by the second.

Garrett said nothing.

He simply closed his hand into a fist, very slowly, and felt the truth settle over him like ice water.

He had suspected this from the beginning. Either the brakes, or a bomb. He had turned both possibilities over in his mind when he first learned of Mason’s plan.

What he had not admitted to himself – not fully – was that he had nudged Mason toward this path.

Not directly. Never directly.

A word here. A suggestion there. A carefully placed piece of information that pointed Mason’s grief in a useful direction.

He had wanted Mason to act. He had wanted the chaos.

He had not wanted to be sitting inside the target when it happened.

The trap he had helped build was now buried around all of them, himself included.

The car screamed forward at over a hundred miles per hour, and somewhere beneath the floor, a bomb waited.

Theron broke first.

He lunged forward and grabbed the headrest of the driver's seat with both hands, shaking it violently, his voice climbing into something raw and unrecognizable.

'I don't want to die here! Do you hear me? I don't want to die in this car! Someone do something – anyone – get this car to stop!'

'Shut up,' Victor snapped.

'Shut up?' Theron whipped around to face him, eyes wild. 'Shut up? What good does shutting up do? Is staying quiet going to stop the car? Is it going to get that bomb off the undercarriage?'

Victor's nostrils flared. 'Your screaming isn't helping either.'

'Neither is your silence!'

Outside, through the open windows, Theodore's voice cut through the noise with clean, focused calm.

'Jasper.' He leaned toward the phone. 'Does Mason have a specific detonation point? A location he's waiting to reach before he presses it?'

Jasper's voice came back broken and fast. 'I think so. He wouldn't want casualties. He'd wait until the car

was far from the city, somewhere with no bystanders.' A sharp breath. 'But I don't know exactly when. I don't know how close he's watching.'

Theodore absorbed that without a word.

Garrett calculated quickly.

Twenty minutes, roughly, before they reached the outer roads where the city gave way to open land.

But twenty minutes assumed Mason was following a plan.

Plans changed.

And that was when Garrett understood what he had missed.

Mason hadn't cut the brakes to cause an accident.

He had cut the brakes to make sure the car couldn't stop.

A moving car couldn't be searched. A moving car gave no one time to find the device and dismantle it.

The brake failure wasn't the weapon – it was the cage.

Victor turned to him, and for the first time, there was something close to desperation in his expression.

"You always have answers," Victor said, his voice low and tight. "You're the one who always has a plan for

everything. So think of something. Now."

"I'm thinking," Garrett said.

"Think faster."

Cold sweat tracked down the back of Garrett's neck.

He was thinking. He was thinking very hard.

But beneath the calculations, a different question was gnawing at him.

Was any of this real?

Theodore had known about Mason. Theodore had placed all three of them in this car deliberately, Gideon was sitting in the front seat with an expression of someone who had already made peace with whatever happened next.

Was this a genuine crisis – or was it a box?

A controlled environment designed to make them panic, to make them talk, to strip away every careful layer they had built around themselves until something true came spilling out?

Victor opened his mouth twice and closed it again without speaking.

Garrett watched him.

Victor knew something. Victor had arranged something – the truck, most likely. Garrett had suspected it when he saw the vehicle in the rear window.

But Victor couldn't say it. Not with Gideon sitting three feet away.

So Victor stayed silent and sweated, caught between two kinds of fear.

Then the windshield exploded with noise.

A drone hit the glass with a sound like a gunshot.

The impact wrenched the steering wheel sideways. The car lurched violently, fishtailing across the lane,

and Theron screamed again – a short, sharp sound of pure animal terror.

The driver wrestled the wheel back. The car straightened, barely.

Everyone stared at the drone.

It had lodged itself against the windshield, cracked but not broken, held in place by the frame. Strapped to its body was a phone, screen facing inward, a video call already active.

The screen showed a face.

Mason. closed, still, carrying the

He was sitting somewhere quiet. His expression was the same as it always particular weight of someone who had decided something a long time ago and had not changed his mind since.

He was holding a whiteboard.

He turned it toward the camera.

Did you arrange Serena's death?

The car went silent except for the engine and the wind.

Gideon looked at the screen for a long moment.

"No," he said. His voice was completely steady. "I did not."

Mason's expression didn't shift.

He lowered the board and wrote again, then held it up.

I found the evidence in the study. I found the records. You sent someone to tamper with her car. You killed her. He paused. *I hope you spend whatever life you have left paying for what you did to her.*

Theron made a sound that was half sob, half calculation.

“He’s right!” Theron burst out, turning toward the drone’s camera. “He’s right – my father arranged it – I had nothing to do with it, I was only following orders, I didn’t know what he was planning, I-”

“Theron.” Gideon’s voice was a single quiet note of warning.

Theron ignored it entirely.

Mason recognized him. He could see it in the way Mason’s eyes sharpened on the screen.

Mason wrote again.

You sent Jasper away. You’re the one who had him taken. She spent the rest of her life trying to find her son. She died because of you. You’re both responsible.

He reached to the side.

When his hand came back into frame, it was holding a remote.

His thumb moved toward the red button.

“Please!” Theron’s voice cracked completely. “Please, I’ll fix it – I’ll punish my father myself, I’ll make him pay for what he did to Serena, I swear it – and Jasper, I’ll take care of him, I’ll treat him well, I’ll-”

Theodore spoke from the car alongside them, his voice measured and quiet.

“Mason.” He waited a beat. “My mother’s greatest wish was to find her youngest son. He’s home now. He’s safe.” Another pause. “If you press that button, you take his future with you. She would never want that. Not from you. Not from someone she trusted.”

Mason’s hand stilled.

Something moved behind his eyes.

Theron saw it and grabbed onto it like a lifeline.

“Yes – exactly – listen to Theodore, Mason, please – I’ll do everything he said, I swear on my life-”

Mason looked back at the screen.

He picked up the whiteboard one more time.

I don’t believe a single word any of you say.

His thumb pressed down toward the button.

Theron let out a sound like a dying man.

And then Garrett’s voice cut through everything, hard and sudden and absolute.

“Mason.” He leaned toward the drone’s camera, his face tight, his voice stripped of every careful layer he had worn for years. “The person who killed Theodore’s mother was not Gideon.”

He exhaled once.

“Every piece of evidence you found in that study – every record, every document – I had it fabricated. All of it. I planted it there myself.” Both cars fell silent.

Alpha’s Abandoned Daughter is the Secret Heiress! - Chapter 453[1,302 words]

(Author’s POV)

Gideon spun around in the front seat.

His sharp grey eyes locked onto Garrett with a force that could have pinned a man to a wall.

“What did you just say?”

His voice was quiet. That made it worse.

Garrett met those eyes. For one fraction of a second, something close to panic flashed through him.

Then he crushed it.

Stay calm. Stay alive.

He forced his gaze back to the phone screen strapped to the drone on the windshield.

Mason hadn't pressed the button.

But he was writing again.

He held the whiteboard up.

You're stalling. All of you. The car can't stop. It only takes one second.

Mason's eyes were red. His hand drifted back toward the remote.

His thumb hovered over the red button.

Garrett's throat tightened.

There was no retreat left. No careful angle to play. No version of this that ended with him walking away clean.

So he chose the only thing that might keep him breathing.

He leaned toward the drone's camera and shouted.

"I did it to make you do my dirty work for me! I used you, Mason! I wanted you to kill Gideon – and then I was going to pin every last piece of it on Theodore!"

The thumb stopped moving.

Mason stared at the screen.

His expression didn't change. But his hand went very still.

Garrett saw it and grabbed onto that stillness like a rope over a cliff edge.

"Just listen to me. Five minutes. Give me five minutes before you decide anything."

Mason's jaw worked. He picked up the whiteboard again.

Five minutes.

Garrett exhaled once and started talking.

He laid it out from the beginning. The package he had sent to Jasper – carefully chosen, carefully timed. The way he had arranged for Theron to be elsewhere, creating space for suspicion to grow between Jasper and Mason and Theodore. Every step designed to push Mason's grief in a specific direction.

Then the evidence. The records in Gideon's study. Every document, every trail – all of it fabricated. All of it placed there by Garrett's own hand, built to make Mason believe that Gideon had ordered Serena's death, so that the blame would flow naturally upward and then crash down entirely on Theodore.

Garrett kept his voice flat as he said it. Clinical. The way a man explains a chess move after the game is already lost.

Because that was the calculation he had made.

Die here, and there was nothing. No inheritance. No position. No future of any kind.

Confess here, and he lost the right to lead. But he kept his life.

Between the two, the answer was simple.

Victor sat beside him and said nothing throughout. He didn't need to. Garrett could feel the same arithmetic running behind Victor's silence.

Power was worth fighting for.

It was not worth dying for.

On the screen, Mason listened. His face was pale and very still. But Garrett could see it happening – the way each detail landed. The package. The timing. The fabricated records. Every piece matched something Mason had lived through, something he had believed without question because it had fit so perfectly into his grief.

The whiteboard slipped from Mason's fingers.

He didn't pick it up.

He sat down heavily, right there on the ground, like the bones had gone out of his legs all at once.

He stared at nothing.

He had been a piece on someone else's board the entire time. Moved. Aimed. Fired.

And he had never once seen the hand that held him.

The moment Garrett finished speaking, the car lurched.

Not an explosion.

A stop.

The brakes caught with a violent, shuddering force. The inertia threw all three men forward. Theron slammed both hands against the seat in front of him. Garrett's shoulder hit the door.

Then stillness.

Theron was still gripping the armrest with white-knuckled hands when the car ahead of them stopped as well.

Two doors opened.

Amelia stepped out first, followed by Theodore.

They walked side by side toward the stopped car, unhurried, as if they had simply pulled over to admire the view.

Amelia reached the window and tilted her head with a light smile.

"That must have been quite a scare," she said pleasantly. "Are you all alright in there?"

Theron's voice came out strangled. "The brakes failed. That was real. You can't tell me that was staged-"

"New vehicle safety system," Theodore said. His tone was completely even. "Automatic intervention. It overrides the controls and stops the car when certain conditions are met."

Theron opened his mouth. Closed it.

From Theodore's phone, Marcus's voice came through clearly.

"All clear on my end."

Theodore didn't look away from his father.

"Mason wasn't performing," he said. "He genuinely intended to detonate the device. If I hadn't been able to demonstrate the truth in time – and if Marcus hadn't been managing the secondary controls – that car would have gone up."

He paused.

"This wasn't theater. It was the only environment where the truth would actually come out."

Gideon had not moved from the front seat.

He sat quietly, watching through the windshield as Theodore stood in the road with the late light behind him.

He had watched the entire thing unfold. The panic. The screaming. The calculations. The moment Garrett's composure cracked and the truth came pouring out of him because survival demanded it.

He understood now what Theodore had built.

A box. A genuine, dangerous box – with just enough real threat inside it to make every careful mask fall off.

Garrett let out a short, humorless sound from the back seat.

"You used Grandfather's life as a stake," he said. His voice had gone cold and flat. "You actually gambled with the Alpha King."

Theodore looked at him.

"The people who were willing to use the Alpha King as a bargaining chip in an inheritance war," he said, "were sitting in that car."

Garrett had no answer for that.

The silence that followed was the kind that settled into a man's chest and stayed there.

Then Garrett's composure cracked in a different direction. Not fear this time. Something rawer.

"We're his grandsons too," he said. "We bled for this family. We worked. We built things. And you—" He stopped. Swallowed. "You don't lift a finger and everything falls into your hands."

Victor's voice came out low and tight. "Grandfather clawed his way to Alpha King through blood and fire. He fought for it. Why should the rules change now?"

Gideon turned in his seat.

He looked at both of them for a long moment.

Then he laughed once – a short, self-deprecating sound.

"I fought," he said. "I fought hard. But I never once thought about ending my parents' lives to win."

His expression settled into something grave.

“You should be thanking Theodore. Not resenting him.” He let the words land. “Without him choosing to do this the way he did – you would both be looking at the rest of your lives behind bars.”

Neither Garrett nor Victor spoke.

Gideon pushed the car door open and stepped out slowly.

He stood in the road for a moment, and something about the set of his shoulders looked older than it had an hour ago.

Amelia spotted him and raised her hand in an easy wave.

“Alpha King,” she said warmly. “I’ll drive you to pick up Theodore’s brother. I swear on my life my car is completely safe.”

Gideon looked at her. At the genuine brightness in her eyes.

Something in his chest loosened slightly.

He got into her car.

Before she closed the door, he turned to look at Theodore one last time.

“Everything from here,” Gideon said, his voice carrying the full weight of what he meant, “is yours to handle. I’m going to bring my youngest grandson home.”

It was not a casual statement.

It was a transfer.

Amelia leaned out the window and grinned at Theodore. “I’ll take good care of him, don’t worry.”

“Drive carefully,” Theodore said.

Amelia turned back to the front.

“I should warn you,” she told Gideon conversationally, “I have a bit of a heavy foot.”

She pressed the accelerator to the floor.

The car shot forward with a roar and disappeared down the road, leaving Theodore, Marcus, and the others standing in sudden silence.

Theodore watched the car shrink into the distance.

He closed his eyes briefly.

Alpha's Abandoned Daughter is the Secret Heiress! - Chapter 454[1,266 words]

(Author's POV)

The escort vehicles caught up one by one, pulling to a stop along the roadside.

Theodore turned back toward the car.

Garrett and Victor climbed out, their faces carrying that particular mix of defiance and defeat that men wear when they've already lost but haven't yet accepted it.

Theodore looked at the guards stepping down from the escort vehicles and gave the order without raising his voice.

"Take those two."

The guards moved immediately.

Theron was still standing beside the car. He hadn't been touched. His eyes found Theodore's face with something painfully close to hope, his mouth already opening to say something careful and calculated.

Theodore cut him off before a single word came out.

"You're Mason's to deal with."

The color drained from Theron's face all at once.

Mason. The man he had wronged most deeply. The man who had just been sitting on a roadside with a detonator in his hand.

A living chance?

He started to say something. His mouth moved. His hands reached out slightly.

The guards were already steering him toward a vehicle.

Theodore didn't watch him go.

He turned, got into the car, and told Marcus to drive.

They had a location to reach.

The small town was unremarkable. Flat land, sparse trees, the kind of place that didn't appear on any important map.

Theodore found the building Marcus had identified and walked in without hesitation.

What he found inside made him stop for exactly one second.

Theron was on the floor. He was breathing, but only barely. The sound of it was wet and labored.

Mason stood over him, chest heaving, something clenched in one hand.

His eyes were still red.

Theodore looked at the scene with an expression that didn't shift toward pity or away from it. He simply assessed it.

Then he spoke, his voice completely even.

"You don't need to rush this. There's no deadline." He held Mason's gaze. "You have the rest of your life to settle what he owes you."

Mason stared at him for a long moment.

Then he let out a slow breath and dropped the thing in his hand. It clattered against the floor.

He signed with both hands, his movements deliberate.

Keep him alive. Everything else is yours to decide.

Theodore nodded once.

Then he said, "Jasper is back at the Pack House."

Mason went very still.

It was the kind of stillness that lives in a person's chest, not their body. His hands didn't move for several seconds.

Then he shook his head.

He signed slowly, each word careful.

Don't tell him where I am. Let him start over. I don't want him anywhere near these hands.

He looked down at his own palms when he signed the last part.

Theodore looked at him for a moment.

He didn't argue. He didn't offer comfort that hadn't been asked for.

"Alright," he said.

He left two guards at the door, turned, and walked out with Marcus at his side.

(Amelia's POV)

Jasper's place wasn't large, but it had the particular warmth of a space that someone had actually lived in.

Books stacked at odd angles. A half-finished sketch on the table.

Gideon stood in the middle of it looking like a man trying to remember how to be a grandfather.

When Jasper came out of the back room and saw the old Alpha King standing in his living space, he stopped walking.

Neither of them spoke for a moment.

Then Gideon straightened his shoulders and said what he had come to say.

"I owe you an apology that no words can fully cover." His voice was steady, but only just. "The Crimson family owes you a life. I'd like to offer five percent of the Crimson Moon Pack's shares as partial restitution."

Jasper looked at him.

This was the man who had never known he existed. The man whose family had failed to protect him before he was even old enough to know what protection meant.

The silence stretched out.

Then Jasper said, "I won't forgive what happened. I want to be clear about that."

Gideon nodded. He didn't flinch.

"But I'll take the shares," Jasper finished.

Something in Gideon's expression shifted. Not relief exactly. More like a man setting down a weight he'd been carrying since he walked through the door.

“That’s enough,” the old Alpha said quietly.

Jasper packed light. A few changes of clothes, a worn notebook, the small things that actually mattered to him. He didn’t look around the apartment when he left.

I called Theodore from the car.

“We’re on our way back. Jasper’s with us.”

“Good.” A pause. “Stay for dinner tonight.”

I glanced at Jasper in the seat beside me, then at Gideon’s profile in the front.

“Are you cooking?” I asked.

“No.”

“Then yes,” I said. “I’ll stay.”

I could hear something that wasn’t quite a laugh on his end before he ended the call.

The Pack House dining room felt different with Jasper in it. Quieter in some ways. More complete in others.

Seven o’clock came, and Theodore walked through the front door still carrying his cane, still moving with that unhurried authority that filled a room before he’d crossed half of it.

Jasper looked up from his seat.

Something shifted in his expression. His eyes brightened slightly, just for a moment. He gave Theodore a small, careful nod.

Theodore returned it.

Gideon asked the question that was sitting over the whole table.

“Garrett and Victor?”

Theodore took his seat before answering.

“Relocated to the African territories. Both families. Twenty years before they’re permitted to return.” He reached for his glass. “I’ve left them ten percent of the local mineral company’s shares. They’ll have to manage it themselves if they want to see any return.”

Gideon considered that. “And Magnus?”

“Same arrangement. African territories, new energy plant, ten percent stake.”

The old Alpha was quiet for a moment.

Then he said, “Better than a cell.”

“Significantly more useful,” Theodore agreed.

Gideon turned to Jasper next.

“Have you thought about joining the Pack’s operations? There’s a place for you, if you want it.”

Jasper shook his head without hesitation. “I want to stay in the entertainment industry.”

He glanced briefly at me.

“I’m planning to sign with Amelia’s company.”

Theodore looked at his brother across the table.

“Whatever path you choose,” he said, “I’m your backing. That doesn’t change.”

Jasper was quiet for a moment.

Then, for the first time all evening, he said Theodore’s name out loud.

“Theodore.” He paused. “What happened to Mason?”

The table went still.

Theodore didn’t hesitate.

“He didn’t want to disrupt your life,” he said. “He’s left Ashford.”

It was a gentle lie, and everyone at the table who knew the truth let it stand.

Jasper looked down at his plate.

Something moved through his eyes. Bitter, and soft, and very old.

He didn’t ask anything else.

After a moment, he lifted his head and said quietly, “Thank you. For stopping him before he crossed a line he couldn’t come back from.”

The weight of that sat over the table for a breath.

I decided the table had carried enough weight for one evening.

“Alright,” I said, reaching for the serving dish in the center and pushing it toward Jasper. “We are celebrating tonight. Eat something. All of you.”

I looked around the table with my best authoritative expression.

“The dust has finally settled. That deserves a proper meal.”

Gideon made a sound that was almost a laugh.

Even Jasper picked up his fork.

When the plates were cleared and the wine was gone, I followed Theodore down the hallway toward his rooms in the Pack House.

He pushed the door open and I walked in ahead of him.

The room was exactly what I would have expected. Clean lines, nothing unnecessary, a single lamp casting warm light across the window seat.

I made a slow circuit of the space, checking corners, running a hand along the bookshelf, peering at the view from the window with great seriousness.

Then I settled into the armchair by the window, tucked one leg under me, and tilted my head to look at

Theodore.

The corner of my mouth pulled up.

“Theodore,” I said, “why don’t you ask me to stay?”

Alpha’s Abandoned Daughter is the Secret Heiress! - Chapter 455[
1,326 words]

(Amelia’s POV)

Theodore smiled at my question.

It wasn’t his usual controlled smile. This one reached his eyes.

“If you stayed here with me,” he said, “we’d be sharing the same room. I’m not certain my self-control would hold.”

He leaned back slightly, his expression settling into something more serious.

“When I stay at your place, there’s at least a wall between us. I can manage that.” He paused. “My legs are almost fully healed. I don’t want to ruin our first night together at the very last moment.”

I tilted my head and looked at him with a deliberately innocent expression.

“So you’re not worried that without any rehearsal, our first time might disappoint you?”

He laughed. Low and genuine, the kind of sound he didn’t let out often.

Then he straightened his expression with great effort and said, “I won’t let that night leave either of us with any regrets. I promise you an experience unlike anything you’ve had before.”

He paused, and a trace of amusement crept back in.

“And if it somehow falls short of expectations, I’ll compensate you repeatedly until you’re fully satisfied.”

I burst out laughing despite myself.

“A compensation system,” I said. “That’s surprisingly considerate of you.”

Then my phone rang.

The sound cut straight through the warmth in the room. I pulled it out and checked the screen.

Silas.

I answered immediately. “What is it?”

Silas’s voice was as calm as always. “Lyra is screaming to be let out. She’s making quite a scene.”

I curved my lips slightly. “She cracked that fast? Fine. I’ll come handle it.”

I ended the call and tucked the phone away, rolling my shoulders back in a slow stretch.

“It’s getting late anyway,” I said to Theodore. “I’ll head out. Lance and Lyra need dealing with.”

Theodore reached for his cane and pushed himself to his feet.

“I’ll walk you out,” he said. “Consider it physical rehabilitation.”

I looked at his legs.

He was standing steadier than he had a month ago. The time he could stay on his feet kept growing

longer. Something genuinely warm moved through my chest.

“Alright,” I said.

We walked out together.

Outside the room where Lance and Lyra were being held, I could already hear the noise before I reached the door.

Shouting. Something hitting a wall. A woman’s crying that kept breaking into screams.

I pushed the door open.

Lance had Lyra backed into the corner. He was hitting her, not carefully, not holding back. His fists connected with her arms and shoulders as she tried to shield herself, and he was cursing between every blow.

“You’re a curse on this entire family,” he spat. “You’re the reason we’re finished. You offended her, and now every single one of us is paying for it.”

Lyra sobbed and reached for him. “I raised you. I gave you everything. How can you-”

“Drake family money raised me.” Lance shoved her back against the wall. “Not you. If it weren’t for you, my father wouldn’t be where he is. My family wouldn’t be destroyed.”

I stood in the doorway and watched for a moment.

Then I said, “Lyra.”

She snapped her head toward me instantly, her face streaked with tears and already beginning to bruise.

“Do you still want to be reunited with your son?”

She didn’t even hesitate.

She crossed the room and threw herself at my feet, grabbing at the hem of my coat, crying so hard the words barely came out coherent.

“He’s a traitor,” she wept. “He’s worse than a dog. I raised him and this is what I get-”

I stepped back and extracted my coat from her grip.

“I’m giving you one last chance,” I said. “Out of blood relation. Go take care of Alaric. Look after him. properly.”

Lyra’s whole body went rigid with relief. She pressed her forehead to the floor and swore, over and over, that she would dedicate herself to the old man’s care, that she was genuinely sorry, that she understood everything now.

I let her finish.

Then I turned to Silas.

“Send them both to Thornpeak Settlement.”

Silas nodded without blinking.

Lyra’s swearing stopped mid-sentence. She looked up at me with an expression that had gone completely blank.

I didn’t explain myself.

The Drake Pack was already gone. Lance was the kind of person who would never stop being dangerous if left with any freedom at all. Keeping him locked up indefinitely was a waste of resources.

Thornpeak Settlement was remote and unpleasant. Lance had spent years using his family’s power to bully Lyra. Out there, stripped of that power, the balance between them would shift completely.

Let them spend the rest of their lives tangled up with each other in that desolate place. They deserved exactly that kind of company.

(Author’s POV)

Derek had been pacing since he heard the news.

Twenty years in Africa. The entire branch relocated. No exceptions, no negotiations, no timeline to revisit the decision.

He had counted on Theodore's legs never recovering. He had watched the family's internal tensions and waited for a crack he could slip through. He had thought, if the right moment came, he could use it to get at Amelia.

That possibility was gone now.

Every door had closed at once.

Garrett lay in bed, his injuries from the day's events keeping him flat on his back. He watched his younger brother grab his phone and head for the door and said, sharply, "Don't."

Derek didn't stop walking.

"Derek." Garrett's voice hardened. "Don't be an idiot. Sit down."

"I just want to take a walk," Derek said, not turning around.

He pulled the door open and stepped outside.

The screaming started less than a minute later.

It was the kind of sound that made the servants freeze in place. Raw and desperate, like something had gone very wrong very fast.

Two of them found Derek just outside the door, thrashing and clawing at his own skin. By the time they got him back into the room, his arms and neck and face were covered in red welts, dense and spreading, and he was still scratching even as they held him down.

"Bugs," he gasped. "There were hundreds of them. They came out of nowhere. I couldn't—I couldn't even run—"

He kept scratching. His fingernails had already broken the skin in a dozen places.

Garrett stared at him from the bed.

His expression was not sympathetic. It was calculating, and then it was grim.

He had heard the rumors about Amelia. The Shadow Healer. The Shadow King. Someone who had dismantled the Drake family from the inside out while they were still convinced they had the upper hand.

Someone who reportedly had ways of dealing with enemies that didn't require her to be in the same room.

"This was her," Garrett said flatly.

Derek looked up, still twitching with the need to scratch.

“She set this up before we even thought about moving against her,” Garrett continued. His voice was quiet and very serious. “The Drake family had centuries of power behind them. Connections, resources, influence. She destroyed all of it.”

He let that sit for a moment.

“What exactly did you think you were going to do to her?”

Derek opened his mouth.

“Don’t answer that,” Garrett said. “Just listen.”

He pushed himself up slightly against the headboard, ignoring the pull of his own injuries.

“Heal up. The moment you can travel, you get on a plane to Africa. You don’t look back, you don’t reach out to anyone here, and you don’t spend a single second thinking about revenge.” His grey eyes were flat and certain. “If you do anything else, what happened to you just now will look like a pleasant afternoon.”

Derek sat on the floor surrounded by servants who didn’t know whether to help him or leave, covered in welts, shaking slightly.

The anger that had been driving him all day was simply gone.

What was left was exhaustion and a deep, humiliating itch he couldn’t do anything about.

“Fine,” he muttered. He dropped his head back against the wall. “Fine. Just—find something to make this stop.”

Victor’s situation was no better.

He had spent two full hours being dealt with after the family meeting, and the evidence of it was written across his entire body. He was barely functional.

And Theodore’s order carried no room for appeal: the moment the family meeting concluded, immediate departure for Africa.

No recovery period. No grace window.

Alpha’s Abandoned Daughter is the Secret Heiress! - Chapter 456[
1,319 words]

(Author’s POV)

Victor reached out and grabbed his subordinate's arm.

"Bring me my phone."

The man handed it over without a word.

Victor's first thought was Vivian. She hadn't been there when he returned. He'd assumed she was keeping a low profile somewhere in the house.

"Where did she go?" he asked.

The subordinate shifted his weight. "She left shortly after you came back, sir. Took a bag with her. Didn't say where she was headed."

Victor went still.

Something cold settled in his chest.

He dialed her number immediately.

It rang for a long time before she picked up.

"Vivian." His voice came out sharp. "There's a crisis in this family and you're not home. Explain yourself."

Her voice was rushed and unsteady, nothing like the imperious tone she usually carried. "Victor, I'm sorry. I can't go to Africa with you. I just can't. I need to stay here, so I have to find somewhere to lay low for a while."

"Lay low," he repeated. "You think you can hide from Theodore's people?"

"I have someone helping me."

Victor's jaw tightened. Every movement sent pain spiking through his injuries, but he forced himself to stay focused. "Someone helping you? Don't tell me it's one of those useless men who were always hanging around you. Vivian, I don't care how desperate things get—don't compromise yourself by getting tangled up with someone like that."

He hadn't even finished the sentence when he heard it.

A sharp, short cry from her end of the line. The sound of a palm connecting with skin. Then a burst of static and shuffling, and a man's voice, rough and aggressive, filled the speaker.

"Victor. When you were on top, we kept our mouths shut. But you're being shipped off to Africa now permanently. You're never coming back. So what exactly gives you the right to

look down on anyone? A pause, and then the voice dropped into something almost satisfied. “Your sister’s only done now ligh used to it.”

The line went dead.

Victor lowered the phone slowly.

He stared at the wall across from him.

Vivian was an idiot. He’d always known it on some level, but he’d protected her anyway because she was family. Africa was brutal and thankless, but it was survivable. It was a place where they could still stand on their own feet.

Instead she’d run straight into the arms of a man she would have laughed at six months ago.

He closed his eyes and exhaled.

Whatever happened to her from here on out was a consequence she had chosen for herself.

He set the phone down and said nothing more.

(Author’s POV)

A week later, the Crimson Moon Pack convened a formal family meeting.

The meeting hall was large and deliberately neutral in its arrangement. Lawyers and representatives from two major media organizations were already seated along the side wall when the family members arrived.

Evelyn came alone, composed and unreadable as always.

Cordelia arrived with her husband and Natasha, who was practically vibrating with barely contained energy.

Vincent walked in with his son, nodded to those already present, and took his seat.

The third branch had been occupied with overseas operations for years and had long since lost any realistic claim to the inheritance. They sent no one. Magnus’s branch was equally absent.

Theodore arrived last, with Jasper beside him.

Alpha King Gideon stood at the head of the room. His white hair and sharp grey eyes gave him the look of someone who had long since stopped tolerating anything that wasted his time.

He didn't make a lengthy speech.

He stated, clearly and on the record, that Theodore Crimson was the sole designated heir of the Crimson Moon Pack. All family assets and holdings would be transferred to him through proper legal channels. effective immediately.

No one in the room raised an objection.

Natasha was the first one on her feet. She crossed to Theodore before anyone else could ever, her golden eyes bright and unabashedly delighted.

"Congratulations, cousin," she said. "And—I know this is a bit forward—but I'm hoping that in the future, if I ever need backing, you'll remember me."

Theodore looked at her with mild amusement. "We'll see."

Cordelia touched her daughter's elbow lightly and murmured something close to her ear. Natasha nodded,

her expression settling into something more measured.

After the formal proceedings concluded, most of the family filtered out.

Evelyn stayed.

She waited until the room was nearly empty before she approached Theodore. She didn't bother with pleasantries.

"Zane Jenkins," she said. "Are you planning to move against him?"

Theodore met her gaze. "Yes."

Evelyn was quiet for a moment, as though confirming something she had already suspected.

"There's a political push happening right now," she said. "My husband is looking for a significant case to anchor his next move. Something that would make a real impact." She held Theodore's gaze steadily. "If you're gathering evidence on Zane Jenkins, we'd like to be the ones to bring him down officially."

Theodore understood the exchange immediately.

“I’ll compile everything,” he said. “When it’s ready, your husband gets first access. He handles the official case. We both benefit.”

Evelyn gave a single, brief nod. “Agreed.”

That evening, the family gathered for dinner at the old mansion.

Alpha King Gideon raised the subject of Theodore’s engagement to Amelia partway through the meal, his tone suggesting it was less a question and more a timeline he expected to hear.

Theodore set down his glass. “I intend to formalize everything. But Zane Jenkins is still a loose end. I won’t move forward on the wedding until that’s resolved.”

Jasper, sitting two seats down, glanced up at the name.

He didn’t say anything immediately. He picked up his fork, set it back down, and seemed to be turning something over in his mind.

“Zane Jenkins,” he said slowly.

Theodore looked at him.

“I might be misremembering,” Jasper said. He looked faintly uncertain, the way someone does when they’re not sure whether to trust a memory that feels distant and blurred. “When was Hang Uncle Mandi I used to help out at a roadside stall sometimes. There was a man who clante srand cheatly collected protection money from the vendors.” Jasper paused. “His name was Zane Jenner. I think. It was a long time ago, so I’m not certain.”

The table was quiet for a moment.

Theodore picked his glass back up. “Don’t worry about it,” he said lightly. “It’s probably nothing.”

Jasper nodded and let it go.

But Theodore had already filed the name away in a place he would not forget.

(Amelia’s POV)

Theodore called me that same night.

He told me what Jasper had said. The roadside stall. The protection money. The name Zane Jenner.

I didn’t respond right away.

I sat with it for a moment, turning the two names over against each other in my mind. Zane Jenner. Zane Jenkins.

“I’ll have Silas look into it,” I said. “Whether those two names connect to the same person.”

“That was my thought,” Theodore said.

We moved on to Meadow Brook Pack.

I had been watching the situation there for days, and something about it had been sitting wrong with me. I told Theodore what I’d noticed.

“Those convicts who were smuggled into the village,” I said. “They’ve been completely quiet. No

disruptions, no incidents. Nothing. They move through that place like ordinary travelers passing through.”

Theodore was silent for a few seconds.

“That’s exactly what they want you to see,” he said. “Those convicts are a smokescreen. A decoy. While everyone is watching them, the real threat is somewhere else entirely.”

The moment he said it, something clicked into place.

I ended the call with Theodore and immediately dialed Silas.

“Stop tracking the convicts,” I told her. “Redirect everything. I need you to find out what Zane Jenkins has actually been building inside Meadow Brook Pack. The real operation. Not the distraction.”

Silas acknowledged and disconnected.

Once the direction shifted, things moved quickly.

Three days before the new year, I called Theodore again.

“Silas finished,” I said.

My voice was steady. But the cold underneath it was something I couldn’t quite suppress. “Zane Jenkins plans to destroy Meadow Brook Pack entirely. Wipe it off the map. Those convicts were never the real threat. They were kindling. Something he could point to as justification when the time came to act.”

Alpha's Abandoned Daughter is the Secret Heiress! - Chapter 457[1,208 words]

(Amelia's POV)

The smile on Theodore's face disappeared the moment I finished speaking.

"A massacre." His voice dropped into something cold and flat, a tone I rarely heard from him. "He really thinks he can do whatever he wants."

"Apparently so."

There was a brief pause on the line. Then Theodore spoke again, his voice controlled but carrying an edge beneath every word.

"I looked into the Jenkins and Jenner connection after what Jasper mentioned. They're confirmed twins."

I straightened in my chair.

"Zane Jenkins sent his younger brother away when they were still children," Theodore continued. "Zane Jenner grew up on the streets. Exactly like Jasper remembered – running with a gang, collecting protection money from ordinary vendors."

"And then he disappeared."

"Completely. Like he'd been erased from the world." Theodore's tone was measured. "Shortly after Jenner vanished, Jenkins left the country. Said it was to seek medical treatment abroad. When he came back, people who knew him said his personality had shifted noticeably."

I sat with that for a moment.

The pieces were already arranging themselves in my mind.

"Theodore," I said. "What if the real Zane Jenkins died during that trip? The illness was real – but the man who came back wasn't him."

Theodore was quiet.

"Jenner was already a ghost," I continued. "No records, no ties, no one looking for him. He could have slipped into his brother's life and no one would have known the difference. The 'recovery' abroad was just cover to give him time to learn how to become his brother."

“I don’t have hard evidence yet,” Theodore said. “But the logic holds. And now that we have a direction, the investigation will move faster.”

“It explains a lot,” I said. “The shift in behavior. The ruthlessness. A street criminal who suddenly inverts power and legitimacy – he’d use it like a weapon, because that’s all he’s ever known

“Agreed.” Theodore’s voice was steady. “We’ll confirm it. But for now, what matter weapon what hen planning.”

I moved on.

“He’s ready to act,” I said. “Everything Silas found points to a completed setup. The convicts, the placement, the timing. He’s not waiting much longer.”

“New Year’s Eve,” Theodore said immediately.

“That’s my read too.”

“The countdown. The fireworks. The noise.” Theodore’s tone was almost clinical. “An explosion in the middle of all that celebration – it would take minutes before anyone even registered what had happened.”

I let out a short, cold laugh. “Then let’s make sure the first news of the new year isn’t a village burning. Let it be his arrest instead.”

“That would certainly make an impression,” Theodore said dryly.

We stayed on the line a moment longer before I shifted to other matters.

“Griffin Drake received a life sentence,” I said. “The law couldn’t give him more than that.”

“I know.”

“It’s not enough.” My voice was calm. Completely calm. “I’ll arrange for someone inside the prison. He won’t find it comfortable in there. Not for a single day.”

Theodore didn’t argue with that. He understood what I meant and why.

“Those people deserve to be remembered,” I said. “The ones he used. The ones he threw away.”

“They will be,” Theodore said quietly.

Then his tone shifted, just slightly. Something warmer crept into it.

“Speaking of things being settled,” he said. “My leg has been fully healed for some time now.”

I raised an eyebrow, even though he couldn’t see it. “Is that so.”

“My grandfather has already selected a date. The bonding ceremony is set for the fifth day of the new year.” A brief pause. “That gives us roughly two months to prepare. I assumed you’d want to know.”

I felt something quiet and certain settle in my chest.

“Two months is more than enough,” I said.

“Good.” And just for a moment, I could hear the smile in his voice before he pulled it back into composure.

Two days before the new year, my phone rang.

It was Rowan.

“Those two are going to drive me out of my own home, he announced, skipping any gen hasn’t stopped arguing with that son of hers since the moment they arrived, Morning, noon, and night. I’m starting to sleep with cotton in my ears.”

I pressed my lips together to keep from laughing. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Are you coming back for the new year?” He asked it like he already knew the answer, like he was bracing himself for disappointment. “I know you’re busy. I’m not expecting anything. I just thought I’d ask.

“I’m already on my way,” I said.

The silence on his end lasted a full three seconds.

“You’re-” His voice cracked into something bright and completely unguarded. “You’re already coming?

Right now?”

“Should be there in about an hour.”

I could hear him moving, calling out to his wife, his voice carrying the kind of joy that doesn’t know how to stay quiet.

Forty minutes later, I turned onto the road leading into Meadow Brook Pack.

Alaric and Ethan were standing at the village entrance.

Alaric must have heard from Rowan the moment I hung up. He was already smiling before I stepped out of the car, his white hair catching the winter light, his sharp grey eyes warm in a way they rarely were.

Ethan stood a few steps back, next to Unit-001. His hands were in his pockets. His expression was difficult to read – somewhere between guarded and uncertain, like a person who had something to say and hadn't yet decided whether to say it.

"You didn't have to come out to meet me," I said to Alaric.

"Nonsense," he said simply, and patted my shoulder once.

I glanced at Ethan.

He gave a small, stiff nod.

When Alaric asked what had brought me back, I kept my answer simple. "I wanted to spend the new year with family." I smiled. "It's been a while."

He didn't push further.

We walked back into the village together.

My small house looked exactly as I'd left it. The wooden door, the familiar smell of dried herbs from the window boxes, the narrow front step where I'd sat countless times as a child watching the sun go down, Ethan stopped at the doorway.

He stood there with his hands still in his pockets, not quite entering not quite leaving.

"Come in," I said.

He looked up quickly. Something crossed his face that he tried to control and didn't quite manage. He stepped inside.

Within minutes, half the village seemed to know I was back.

People crowded into the small room, voices overlapping, everyone asking questions at once. How long was I staying? Was I eating well? I looked thinner, didn't I? Could I stay through the third day at least?

Rowan appeared in the middle of it and raised his voice just enough to be heard. "Let her breathe. She just arrived. Go home and she'll see you all tomorrow."

There was good-natured grumbling, but they went.

Rowan's wife set the table while Rowan carried in two dishes from the kitchen. Simple food, hot and fragrant. The kind of meal that didn't need to be anything more than what it was.

Ethan rose to leave.

"Stay," I said.

He stopped.

Eat with us. I have something to ask you afterward." sat back down without a word, but the corner of his mouth moved slightly upward before he caught

himself and pressed it flat.

We ate.

When the bowls were cleared and the table was quiet, I looked at Alaric, then at Rowan.

"There's something you both need to know," I said. "Tomorrow night – New Year's Eve – something serious is going to happen in this village."

Alpha's Abandoned Daughter is the Secret Heiress! - Chapter 458[1,245 words]

Amelia's POV)

"Something serious?" Rowan's voice jumped up an octave. He stared at me with wide eyes. "What kind of serious?"

I kept my face calm and told them everything.

Every detail, Zane Jenkins. The convicts. The bombs. The plan to level the village at midnight on New Year's Eve.

(Author's POV)

"What?!"

Rowan's palm slammed down on the table so hard the bowls rattled and a pair of chopsticks. clattered to the floor.

"That man is out of his mind!" He was on his feet now, face red, voice shaking with fury. "He wants to blow up the whole village? Who does he think he is?!"

“Rowan.” Amelia’s voice was steady. “Sit down.”

He sat, though his jaw was still tight.

Amelia turned to Alaric. The old Alpha’s expression had gone very still, the kind of stillness that came not from calm but from controlled anger.

“Those tourists in the village,” she said. “Every single one of them is a death-row convict who was quietly released.”

Alaric said nothing for a moment. Then he exhaled slowly through his nose.

“We were able to piece it together because Ethan recognized one of them,” Amelia said.

Everyone looked at Ethan.

He shifted slightly in his chair, a little awkward under the attention. But there was something in his eyes – a quiet relief that he had been useful for once.

“It was a face I’d seen in an old file,” he said. “I wasn’t completely sure. But I mentioned it to Amelia.

“And that was enough to connect everything,” Amelia said simply.

Rowan leaned forward. “So what do we do?”

Amelia reached into her bag and pulled out a set of photographs. She spread them across the table one by one.

“Silas mapped the placement.” She pointed to each location marked on the images. “The bombs are buried here, here, and here. Three main sites.”

Rowan studied the photos with the sharp eyes of a man who had spent decades in these hills.

“Tonight,” Amelia said, “I need you to take a small group – people you trust completely and dig them out. Quietly. No noise, no light you don’t need.”

“And replace them with what?”

“Fireworks.” She set a folded paper on the table. “I’ve prepared everything. The casings, the fuses, the timing. They’ll go off exacty when Jenkins expects his bombs to.”

Rowan stared at her. Then a slow, fierce grin spread across his weathered face.

“Tomorrow night,” Amelia continued, “we hold a New Year’s Eve fireworks show in the village. Big, public, live streamed across every platform.”

“A celebration,” Alaric said quietly.

“Exactly.” Amelia folded her hands on the table. “Let him watch his masterpiece become a party.”

Rowan stood up straight and pressed his fist to his chest. “I’ll do it myself. With my own hands if I have to.”

Ethan cleared his throat. “What do you need from me?”

Amelia looked at him. “Tomorrow night, when things get complicated – and they will – I need you to stay close to Grandfather. Don’t leave his side.”

Ethan nodded once. No argument.

Seraphina, who had been quiet, spoke up carefully. “Should Father leave the village early? Just to be safe?”

Alaric turned to her with a look that left no room for debate. “Absolutely not.”

“But-”

“If I disappear the night before, Jenkins will know something has changed His voice was firm. “I won’t be the one who ruins my granddaughter’s plan Seraphina pressed her lips together but didn’t push further

They talked through every detail until the candles had burned low and the night had grown very quiet outside.

One by one, people rose to leave.

When the room was finally empty, Amelia sat alone at the table and picked up her phone.

She opened her social media account and typed a short announcement.

*Spending the new year in my hometown this year. We’re putting on a fireworks show tomorrow night going live at midnight. Come watch.

She posted it and set the phone down.

Within minutes, the comments were flooding in.

*I’m already booking a car, I’m coming

Which village? Drop the location!

*She's doing a LIVE? On New Year's Eve? I'm not sleeping

Amelia looked at the screen for a moment, then set the phone face-down on the table.

The trap was set.

Now they just had to wait.

On the other side of the city, in a room that smelled of expensive wood polish and cold ambition, a man sat sprawled across a wide leather sofa.

His assistant stood at attention near the door.

"Everything's in place, the assistant reported. "All devices are set. Midnight tomorrow – they go off on schedule."

Zane Jenkins swirled the glass in his hand and smiled.

"Good." He took a slow sip. "I'll watch the live stream myself. Front-row seat."

The assistant hesitated, then added, "There's one more thing. Evvie – Amelia Stone – she's gone back to the village."

Jenkins sat up slightly.

Then he laughed.

It was a short, cold sound.

"She went back herself?" He shook his head, still smiling. "Perfect. Save me the trouble of hunting her down. She can burn with the rest of it."

He leaned back again, entirely satisfied.

His phone rang.

He picked it up without looking at the screen,

"Yes?"

"Zane Jenner,"

The name hit him like a fist to the sternum.

His fingers locked around the phone. The glass in his other hand nearly slipped. He caught it, set it down carefully, and said nothing for two full seconds.

“I think you have the wrong number,” he said. His voice came out smooth. Practiced.

“Do I?” Amelia’s tone was almost pleasant. Almost. “I have documentation, Jenner. Your brother’s medical records from the trip abroad. Entry and exit records. Witness accounts from people who knew you both before you switched places.” A brief pause. “If anything happens to me anything at all- every piece of it goes directly to your political enemies. All of them. At once.”

Jenkins’s jaw tightened.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said.

“You also brought death row convicts into Meadow Brook Pack,” she said, her voice shifting into something harder. “Was that your idea, or did someone help you with the paperwork?”

The silence on his end lasted just a fraction too long.

She knew about the convicts.

His mind moved fast. She knew about the convicts – but did she know what they were actually for? Did she understand that the real devices were separate, already buried, already tied? Probably not. She likely thought the convicts themselves were the threat.

He steadied himself.

“I genuinely have no idea what you’re referring to,” he said flatly.

Amelia’s voice went cold.

“Then let me be very clear, she said. “If you are not in Meadow Brook Pack tomorrow night before midnight in person, to meet with me – I release everything. Every document. Every record. Every name.”

The line went dead.

Jenkins sat motionless, staring at the phone in his hand.

The room felt very quiet.

After a long moment, he set the phone on the armrest and turned to his assistant.

“Clear my schedule for tomorrow. I’m going to Meadow Brook Pack.”

The assistant's face went pale. "Sir- tomorrow night is when-"

"I know what tomorrow night is."

Jenkins rose from the sofa and moved to the window, looking out at the city lights below.

Amelia had called him directly. She had named him. She had demanded a face-to face meeting. That meant she still believed there was something to negotiate – which meant she hadn't gone public yet. There was still a window.

He turned the two possibilities over in his mind with the cold precision of a man who had survived by calculating exactly this kind of problem.

If she was willing to deal, he would take the evidence and walk away before midnight.

And if she wasn't – well. He had other methods. He had never yet met someone he couldn't break.

Alpha's Abandoned Daughter is the Secret Heiress! - Chapter 459[1,174 words]

(Author's POV)

The assistant's face was pale.

"Sir," he said carefully, "if you're going into the village yourself – do we still proceed with the original plan? Or should I send someone to remove the devices?"

Zane Jenkins was quiet for a long moment.

He stood at the window, his back to the room, fingers laced behind him.

"Proceed as planned," he said finally.

The assistant blinked. "But you'll be inside-"

"If I haven't made it out by eleven o'clock tonight," Zane said, turning around, "you use this story: I was taken hostage by escaped convicts who infiltrated the village. My life is in danger. Deploy the armed unit immediately. Clear the village. Get me out before midnight."

The assistant absorbed this. Then he nodded slowly.

"Understood."

Zane straightened his jacket and reached for his coat.

“I want to be back in the city before the fireworks start.”

The next evening, his convoy rolled into Meadow Brook Pack just as the sky was turning a deep, bruised orange.

Zane looked out the tinted window at the dirt roads, the low wooden fences, the smoke curling from chimneys.

“Stop someone,” he said flatly.

One of his men stepped out and flagged down a passing villager – an older woman carrying a basket of vegetables.

She looked at the convoy with mild curiosity, then smiled when they asked where the young healer lived.

“Oh, Amelia’s place? Come on, I’ll walk you there.”

She led them cheerfully down a narrow path and stopped in front of a small wooden house. The paint was peeling. The porch steps sagged slightly in the middle,

“There you go,” the woman said brightly, and headed back the way she came.

Zane climbed out of the car,

He stared at the house.

His lip curled, just slightly.

He stepped forward across the muddy ground with the careful, mincing steps of a man deeply concerned about his shoes, picking his way around the worst of the puddles until he reached the doorway.

Inside, Amelia sat on a wooden stool, her head bent over a stone mortar, grinding herbs with slow, even strokes.

She didn’t look up.

(Amelia’s POV)

One of his men knocked on the door. Three sharp, impatient raps.

I lifted my head.

I let my gaze travel from the man in the doorway to the one standing behind him – expensive coat, polished shoes now streaked with mud, a face that was trying very hard to look like it belonged somewhere important.

I smiled.

“Zane Jenner?”

The hand gripping the doorframe went white at the knuckles.

He stepped inside quickly, scanning every corner of the room before he sat down. His eyes were sharp and suspicious, checking for anyone else.

There was no one.

“I don’t know where you heard that name,” he said, his voice carefully flat, “but I’d advise you to stop using it.”

“If you’re not Zane Jenner,” I said pleasantly, “then why did you come all the way out here to this little village to find me?”

“You already know there is no evidence you need to destroy, I said, without looking up came because you were afraid of being exposed. You thought if you got here fast enough you could take whatever I had and make it disappear

“I’m warning you, he said, his voice dropping, ‘don’t play games with me?

I kept grinding.

He exhaled hard through his nose, pressing down the anger rising in his face.

“What,” he said, with forced control, exactly do you think you have on me?”

I set the pestle down.

The two of us looked at each other across the small, dim room.

“You know,” he said softly, and now the pleasantness was entirely gone from his voice, “if anything happens to me while I’m in this village–anything at all–it won’t just be you who suffers. Every person living here will burn with it.”

I laughed.

It came out genuine.

“You were always going to burn this village,” I said. “Whether you walked out of here tonight or not.”

He went very still.

“I don’t know what you’re-”

“Three sites.” I picked up a dried herb and turned it between my fingers, bringing it to my nose. “The devices are buried here, here, and here.” I named the locations without looking at him. “Set to detonate at midnight. You brought the convicts in as cover – so when the investigation starts, the story is that escaped criminals caused the explosion. Not you.”

The color drained from his face.

Behind him, the door burst open.

His man came in fast, gun already drawn, moving straight toward me.

Something dark shot from the shadows beneath the bed.

Black.

The little snake moved like a whip – coiling around the man’s wrist in an instant, sending the gun clattering to the floor. The man gasped, staggered, and then crumpled. The paralytic venom worked fast. He was on the ground and motionless within seconds.

I stood up, walked over, and picked up the gun.

I turned it over in my hand, getting the feel of it.

Then I pointed it at Zane.

“You should have asked Griffin about me before you came here,” I said. “He could have told you. You walked into this house with one man. One.” I tilted my head slightly. “That’s not a negotiation. That’s a gift.”

Zane’s eyes were moving fast, calculating.

“I know about your backup,” I said. “The armed unit waiting outside. If you don’t signal them by eleven, they move in.”

He said nothing.

“That’s exactly what I’m counting on,” I said. “The moment you give that order – the moment you deploy armed force against this village – that’s the moment you’ve signed

your own confession. Abuse of authority. Conspiracy to destroy civilian property. Premeditated mass harm.” I paused. “I needed you to actually do it. Not just plan it.”

The realization moved across his face slowly, like a crack spreading through stone.

“There was never any evidence for you to collect,” he said. His voice was very quiet now. “No,” I agreed. “The phone call was to get you here. In person. On camera.”

He looked around the room again, differently this time.

“Who’s going to believe you?” he said. “Who’s going to take your word over mine?”

“The people watching the live stream,” I said. “This conversation has been broadcasting for the last twenty minutes.” I let that settle. “And there’s also the matter of Theodore’s aunt – Evelyn’s husband. The councilman. He’s been watching as well. He’ll make an excellent witness.”

Zane’s mouth opened.

Then closed.

“Amelia.” His voice came out low, pressurized, like steam behind a sealed valve. “What exactly are you?”

I set the gun down on the wooden bed beside me.

“Funny,” I said. “Griffin asked me the same thing once. I didn’t answer him.” I looked at Zane steadily. “But I’ll answer you.”

I let the silence sit for a moment.

“Have you heard of a private coalition,” I said, “the most powerful gathering of independent minds outside any government’s reach?”

He blinked.

Then something shifted in his eyes recognition, and behind it, a creeping, unwilling dread.

“You’re a member of that organization?”

“No,” I said.

I held his gaze without blinking.

“I lead it.”

The last of the color left his face.

His body seemed to lose something – some internal structure that had been holding him upright – and he sank back against the rough wooden stool, his polished authority dissolving into something that looked very much like fear.

Alpha's Abandoned Daughter is the Secret Heiress! - Chapter 460[1,211 words]

(Amelia's POV)

I tied Zane's wrists behind his back with the same rope I used to bundle dried herbs.

His man was already out cold on the floor from Black's venom. I bound him too, just to be safe, and propped them both against the wooden cabinet by the far wall.

Zane's eyes burned with rage above the cloth stuffed in his mouth.

I ignored him.

I sat back down on my stool and picked up my pestle again.

At seven o'clock, the door swung open.

Rowan came in first, his boots loud on the floorboards. Master Elias followed behind him, and then three others I recognized from the village.

Rowan stopped when he saw Zane.

His eyes traveled from the bound wrists to the gagged mouth to the expensive coat now creased and dirty.

Then he crossed the room in four long strides and drove his boot hard into Zane's chest.

The impact knocked Zane sideways against the cabinet with a hollow thud.

"You miserable piece of filth." Rowan's voice came out low and shaking. "Do you have any idea how many people live in Meadow Brook Pack? You were going to wipe the whole village off the map!"

Zane's man started squirming frantically across the floor, trying to throw himself between Rowan and his employer.

Rowan turned and kicked him aside without breaking stride.

“Don’t rush,” he said coldly. “I’ll get to you in a moment.”

Then he turned back to Zane and drove his boot in again.

Zane couldn’t make a sound. The gag held. He could only squeeze his eyes shut and take it, his body jerking with each blow.

I watched from where I stood.

I didn’t move to stop it.

If Zane’s plan had succeeded tonight, every single person in this village would have been dead before midnight. Every elderly woman who had ever handed me a bundle of vegetables. Every child who had ever run past my porch.

Rowan could kick him all night if he wanted.

Rowan finally stepped back, breathing hard. His face was still tight with fury, but the worst of it had passed.

He turned and dropped into the chair across from me.

“Last night,” he said, catching his breath, “we did exactly what you told us. Every device. All three sites.” He looked up at me. “We dug them all out. Cut the fuses ourselves.”

I nodded. “Good.”

“The explosives are locked in the storage shed at the edge of the eastern field. Nowhere near

the houses.”

“Perfect.” I set the pestle down. “Tonight, before eleven, I need you and Master Elias to get everyone underground. The elderly first. Use the old root cellar beneath the community hall – it’s deep enough.”

Master Elias, who had been standing quietly by the door with his hands folded in his sleeves, spoke up.

“And the convicts?” he asked. “The fourteen on death row. What do we do with them?”

I had already thought this through.

“Keep one,” I said. “One witness, alive and intact, to testify against Zane in court. The rest stay in the village tonight.”

“As bait,” Elias said.

“Yes.”

Rowan’s brow creased. He glanced toward the door, then back at me. “These are convicted killers, Amelia. Without someone watching them, they won’t just sit quietly and wait to be used.”

I turned my head toward the corner of the room.

Unit-001 stood there exactly as it had stood for the past three hours setantly 301, Sarbundy upright, its blue optical sensors a faint glow in the GM light

“It will handle them,” I said.

Rowan looked uncertain. ‘It’s a machine”

“It’s not an ordinary machine. I looked at the robot for a moment. My father Javon Bent years building it. It doesn’t feel pain. It doesn’t get tired. It can’t be stopped by a boles paused. “It will keep the convicts in place until the time comes?

The room was quiet.

One by one, the others exchanged glances, and then the tension in their shoulders slowly eased.

I turned back to the window.

Outside, the village was dark and still. The kind of stillness that sits right before something breaks.

“Let the games begin,” I said quietly.

(Author’s POV)

High on the ridge above Meadow Brook Pack, Zane’s armed unit had been watching the village through binoculars since nightfall.

Their orders were simple.

If Zane did not emerge from the village by eleven o’clock, they were to move in under the cover of a convict pursuit operation, retrieve him, and detonate the buried charges.

The minutes ticked by.

No signal came.

No message. No change of orders. Nothing.

At eleven, their commander lowered his binoculars and gave a single nod.

The unit moved out.

(Amelia's POV)

I ate dinner with Elias and Rowan – bread, cold venison, a pot of herb broth that Elias insisted on making himself.

After that I lay down on the narrow bed and closed my eyes.

I set an alarm for eleven.

When it went off, I was already half-awake.

I pushed myself up, walked to the window, and looked out at the village.

Dark. Quiet.

I picked up my phone and opened the live stream.

The camera light blinked on.

I smiled at the lens.

“The show's about to begin.”

Within thirty seconds, the viewer count was climbing fast. Comments flooded the live chat in a rolling wall of text.

‘Where's Theodore??’*

Is he coming?? We want Theodore!!

Why are you streaming from a village lol

I laughed a little. “He's busy tonight. You'll have to make do with me.”

I turned the camera slowly toward the cabinet.

Zane Jenkins stared back at it, his eyes wide and furious above the gag.

The live chat exploded.

Wait – is that – ??

That’s the council representative!! The one from the northern seat!!

Why is he tied up?? What is going on??

She’s going to be in so much trouble

This has to be staged, right??

I saw something about him online last week – something about a village-

I watched the comments scroll past without answering.

Then the first shot rang out.

It came from the eastern edge of the village – a single crack that split the night air and echoed off the hillside.

The live chat froze for half a second.

Then it detonated.

Was that a firework??

That was NOT a firework

THAT WAS A GUN

someone call the police RIGHT NOW

“That’s gunfire,” I said calmly into the camera. “Those are Zane’s people. They’re moving into the village.”

A scream tore through the darkness outside – high and ragged and very real.

The live chat dissolved into panic.

OH MY GOD

They’re killing people!! Someone is KILLING PEOPLE

Police!! Someone get the police!!

Is this real?? Is this actually happening??

I turned away from the camera.

I reached into my medicine satchel and found the small dark bottle I had prepared earlier.

I soaked a folded cloth with it, walked over to Zane, and pressed it firmly over his nose and mouth.

He thrashed for a few seconds.

Then his eyes rolled back and he went still.

I straightened up and walked to the door.

I pushed it open and stepped out onto the porch, holding the phone up so the camera faced outward into the dark.

Across the village, a figure was running.

Then a shot.

The figure dropped.

The image was grainy at this distance, but the live chat had gone completely silent for one long second before erupting again.

Those are armed personnel

They have tactical gear on

This is not a drill

*SOMEONE IS ORDERING AN ARMED ATTACK ON A CIVILIAN VILLAGE

I stood on the porch and watched the chaos spread through the streets below.

Twenty minutes passed.

Behind me, the wooden door burst open with a crash.

Boots hit the floorboards. Multiple sets, moving fast and hard.

Something cold pressed against the back of my neck.

“Hands up!”