

My Sister 274

Chapter 274 SAFE

CELESTE'S POV

“Up.”

The chain snapped tight as I was hauled forward, biting into my shoulder until pain flared, raw and searing. I stumbled off the truck, landing on concrete steeped in oil and decay. My bare feet slipped. Laughter echoed, sharp and cruel.

“Seriously,” another voice drawled. “Don’t fucking bruise the goods. He’s not going to be happy.”

My stomach lurched at that damning word again: goods.

A chill swept over my skin as the doors crashed shut behind us. The sound reverberated, heavy and final, like a lid sealed. I drew a breath that tasted metallic and stale, saturated with suffering.

Through the dull roar in my skull, I realized that we were lined up.

Chains tugged as bodies were forced into order, collars clinking in a helpless, defeated rhythm.

Someone whimpered behind me. Someone else retched and sobbed until a sharp blow cut the sound off mid-breath.

“Eyes down.”

I lifted my chin out of reflex. They may have taken me to gods knew where and reduced me to about an inch tall, but I still had my pride.

Celeste Lockwood would always hold her head up high.

A fist cracked across my jaw.

A constellation of pain exploded behind my eyes as my head whipped sideways, teeth jarring together. Blood bloomed, warm and coppery, on my tongue.

“I said, eyes down,” the man snarled.

“Lady Celeste?”

I jerked violently, breath hitching as my body recoiled before my mind caught up—muscles locking, breath slicing into my chest.

My hands twitched, fingers curling inward, expecting resistance. Iron. Weight. Pain.

Instead, my nails bit into my own palm.

I sucked in a breath that tasted of salt and warm air, not metal. Not rust. Not rot.

The sun above the Maldivian sky was bright enough to hurt.

It spilled across the water in blinding shards of gold, dancing atop the waves. The blue was flawless, merciless in its beauty.

Palm fronds drifted overhead, their shadows weaving gentle, shifting patterns across the pale stone beneath my feet.

Somewhere nearby, waves lapped gently against the shore, rhythmic and indulgent.

Sun. Sand. Beach. Island.

Beautiful, peaceful, perfect.

Safe.

Catherine's island.

Safe. I was safe.

"Lady Celeste?"

The Omega servant stood a few steps away, hands folded neatly in front of her. She was young—barely more than a girl—with dark hair pulled back tight and eyes that never quite lifted to meet mine.

She looked nothing like Olivia.

Yet every time I saw her, agony lanced through my heart.

"Your treatment is scheduled to begin in ten minutes," she said gently. "Lady Catherine asked me to fetch you."

My mouth tightened.

Already?

I glanced toward the open doors leading back into the villa, where cool marble and filtered air waited. Where that room waited.

"I'll be there," I said, sharper than necessary.

She dipped her head and retreated without another word.

I lingered on the chaise lounge, my heart thudding too hard, too fast. I forced myself to draw in breath after breath, slow and measured, the way Catherine had taught me.

I was safe.

That was the truth I repeated until it stuck.

Catherine had found me. Pulled me out before the worst could happen. That was what mattered.

I eased myself upright, muscles stiff and joints aching with a pain that had nothing to do with lounging too long in the sun. The ocean glittered back, vast and indifferent.

I let out a slow breath, fingers raking through my hair—then froze as my eyes caught on my wrist.

Bare skin stared back at me.

No ink. No mark. No faint shimmer beneath the surface where my bond with Brett had once rested like a living thing.

The tattoo we'd gotten had stayed even after the bond was severed because my wolf, weak as she was, still lived within me.

And now...

A strangled cry ripped from my throat as grief crashed over me, sudden and suffocating. My chest cinched tight, pain flaring sharp behind my sternum, and then—

The escape attempt erupted without warning, fierce and chaotic.

Olivia had planned it in whispers and stolen glances, timing the guards' rotations, counting steps in the dark. She shoved a broken piece of metal—plate or cup, I think—into my hand, her grip fierce.

"When I say run," she told me, eyes blazing, "you don't stop. Don't look back."

My eyes widened. "What about you? We have to get out of here together."

She gave me a grim smile. "One of us is enough. I'll distract them—go!"

"Oliv—"

The alarms screamed and chaos erupted—shouts, gunfire, bodies slamming into concrete. I sprinted barefoot through corridors slick with blood and terror, Olivia's screams echoing behind me.

A blow crashed into my back. I hit the ground, air knocked from my lungs as pain shot up my spine. Hands seized me—too many, everywhere—dragging me backward across the floor.

"No!" I scraped at the concrete, nails splitting, skin shredding. Panic drowned out thought. Fear roared so loud it swallowed everything else.

And then—

Pressure erupted in my chest, sudden and violent, as if a fist punched outward from inside my ribs. Heat surged through my veins, sharp and dizzying. Gold bled into the edges of my vision.

Kharis.

The name tore through me like a prayer and a scream all at once.

She burst through the suppression like a wounded animal shattering its cage. Weak—gods, so weak—but furious. Protective. Mine.

My body convulsed as I tried to Shift.

Bones screamed. Muscles seized halfway between forms, skin burning as if it were being peeled from the inside.

I screamed, the sound raw and ragged as power ripped through me in jagged, uncontrollable bursts.

Claws—half-formed but razor-sharp—slashed across flesh. Someone collapsed, screaming. Another crashed into the wall with a sickening crack.

I sensed it more than saw it, instinct blurring with sensation as I fought with every scrap of strength I had left.

But I didn't have much left.

The surge faltered, sputtering like a dying flame gasping for air.

'Kharis!' I screamed inside myself, terror spiking as the heat drained too fast.

She answered with a sound that wasn't words.

Pain. Apology. Resolve.

I saw Olivia then.

A guard had her by the arm, wrenching it behind her at an unnatural angle. She didn't scream. She just looked at me—eyes wide, fierce, desperate.

"Run!" she called out. "Run, Celeste—"

The shot echoed deafeningly loud.

Olivia's body jerked.

"No!" I screamed, the word shredding my throat as I lunged forward, power flaring wild and useless. I reached for her, my fingers grazed fabric, skin—

Something slammed into my side.

Another blow followed. And another.

I crashed to the ground, vision spinning, blood flooding my mouth. The world lurched as boots slammed into my ribs, my back, my legs.

Kharis surged one last time.

Not to save me.

To shield me.

I felt her wrap around my core, burning bright and fleeting, pouring everything she had into one last desperate stand. Suppression crashed down, brutal and absolute.

Her presence tore away.

The silence was immediate. Absolute.

“No,” I whispered, choking, empty. “No—please—”

Brett’s voice surfaced, unwanted and cruel in its clarity.

‘Stop keeping her locked away like she’s some inconvenience you wish never existed.’

‘Free her. Or one day, you’ll break in ways you can’t recover from.’

I squeezed my eyes shut, jaw clenching.

Memories of Brett were the worst.

That was where I traced the rot. The beginning of my downfall.

If I'd stayed with him. If I hadn't decided that loving him was a liability instead of a refuge. If I hadn't suppressed my wolf to remove all traces of my past.

Would Kharis have been strong enough to protect me all along?

Would I still have her?

Would I still be whole?

"Celeste." Catherine's voice drifted through the haze, calm and controlled as ever.

I straightened by reflex, masking my expression before turning.

My godmother stood in the doorway, sunlight framing her, immaculate in pale linen, silver hair swept into an elegant twist.

She always seemed untouched by the world, no matter what storms raged around.

"You're slipping again," she said gently, stepping closer. "I've told you to let the memories flow over you, not through. The equipment won't sync properly if your brainwaves are agitated."

"I'm fine," I said, though my fingers were clenched so tightly my nails cut into my palms.

I tried to focus on Catherine, on her clear grey eyes and pretty smile. The woman who had saved me. The person whom I trusted most in the world.

She studied me for a long moment, her gaze keen and measuring. Then she smiled, soft and reassuring.

"Of course you are," she said, holding her hand out. "Come. We have work to do."