

My Sister 335

Chapter 335 TECHNICALLY ALIVE

KIERAN'S POV

The drive back to Nightfang was torturous.

Every mile, every turn, put more space between me and what I'd been forced to leave behind—Sera's lips, swollen and soft beneath mine. The almost. The choice she'd nearly made, right before the world barged in and ruined everything.

I'd never been so angry at the sight of the packhouse looming out of the trees, all stone and shadow and responsibility.

Lights burned on the lower level, brighter than they should have been at this hour. A knot tightened low in my gut.

I cut the engine and stepped out, already feeling Ashar coil awake beneath my skin—not with desire this time, but with wariness. The kind that came when something smelled wrong.

Sera lingered beside me. The cold night air stirred loose strands of her hair around her face, and she looked so beautiful, my chest ached.

She watched the packhouse too, and I was sure the wrongness in the air was amplified by her gifts.

“I should let you get to it,” she said softly, shifting her weight back, giving me space the way she always did back when I ran off to handle pack business.

“Sera,” I said, reaching out before she could take another step away.

She paused, turning back to me, brows lifting in question.

I hesitated. Not because I didn’t know what I wanted, but because I was still learning what questions were okay to ask.

“Would you...stay?” I asked, my voice coming out quieter than I intended.

“Not because you have to. Just—” I exhaled, the truth pressing forward. “I want you with me. Through all of it. The good and the bad.”

Her expression softened, her gaze searching.

“If you want,” I added quickly. “I don’t want to pull you into pack business if you’d rather step back.”

For a beat, she just looked at me, still searching. Then she closed the distance, slipping her hand into mine, fingers warm and steady despite the chill in the air.

“I’ll stay,” she said.

The knot in my chest loosened—just a fraction—but it was enough.

I squeezed her hand once, grounding myself in the certainty of her presence, and together we turned toward the packhouse, whatever waited for us inside no longer something I had to face alone.

The conference room—dim, windowless, all stone and restraint—was occupied when I entered. A long table cut the space in half, chairs pulled back in disarray, as if no one had bothered to pretend this was a normal meeting.

The air was thick with layered scents: unease, caution, something bordering on rot.

Gavin stood near the central table, arms folded tight across his chest. My father was beside him, posture rigid, his expression carved into a grim, controlled mask. And near the far wall—

Aaron.

For half a second, my brain refused to reconcile the image before me with the bloody carcass that had been dragged out of my sight.

The first thing I noticed was that he was thinner. Not emaciated, exactly, but hollowed out, as if something essential had been scraped from the inside.

His hair hung longer than regulation, dull and tangled, shadowing his eyes. His shoulders slumped as if the weight of his own body was too much for him.

But it was his eyes that stopped me cold.

They were open. Focused. Technically alive.

But utterly empty.

"Aaron," I said, my voice rough.

He flinched at the sound of his name.

His devoid gaze slid over me slowly, like he was cataloguing shapes rather than seeing people. Then his brows furrowed.

"Alpha?" Not an identification, a question.

My jaw tightened.

“That’s right,” I said. “You remember that much.”

He nodded once. “A wolf should always recognize his Alpha.”

Father’s mouth compressed into a thin line. Gavin muttered a curse under his breath, voice tight with strain.

I took a few steps closer, stopping just out of arm’s reach. Close enough to feel him. To sense the strange flatness where a wolf’s presence should have been pushing back against mine.

I reached out through the mind-link we shared as pack members. There was nothing at the other end of the bridge.

“What is the last thing you remember?” I asked.

Aaron stared past my shoulder, eyes unfocusing slightly. His fingers twitched at his sides, like they wanted to curl into fists but couldn’t quite remember how.

“We were tracking.” His words were stunted, as if he were learning how to speak on the spot. “South ridge. Rogues had been circling for days. I remember the wind changing. Ash and blood. The shout of battle.”

My chest tightened.

“And after that?” Gavin prompted with a dejected sigh, as if he already knew the answer.

Aaron swallowed. “Nothing.”

I watched his throat work. Watched the faint crease form between his brows as he tried—and failed—to reach for something that wasn’t there.

“I woke up in the woods,” he went on. “Didn’t know where I was. Didn’t know how long it had been. Just...knew I should walk north. That home was north.”

“How?” I asked sharply.

He hesitated. Then shook his head. “I don’t know.”

I straightened, turning slightly as movement caught my peripheral vision. Sera stood near the doorway, half in shadow, her arms folded loosely in front of her.

She hadn't said a word since we'd arrived, but her steady watchfulness grounded me, quiet support tempering my growing sense of unease.

She was watching Aaron with a focus that made the hairs on my arms stand on end. What could she sense?

I turned back to Gavin. "Where was he found?"

"Edge of the eastern border," Gavin replied. "Stumbled into one of our patrol routes. Barefoot. No weapon. No scent markers. Like he'd been...scrubbed."

That matched what my instincts had been screaming since I walked in.

"And what about your wolf?" I asked Aaron. "Have you tried to Shift?"

He blinked at me. Confusion creased his face.

"Shift?" he echoed.

Father exhaled slowly through his nose. "He doesn't feel his wolf," he said quietly. "Not even as absence. It's like the concept itself is...gone."

A low, dangerous stillness fell over the room.

"When you look at me," I said slowly, "do you remember anything about me at all?"

Aaron's gaze returned to my face. He studied me with the same careful neutrality as before.

"Alpha," he repeated. "You're my Alpha. I feel your...gravity."

"And Nightfang?" I pressed.

Another pause. Longer this time.

"H-home," he said.

"Anything else?"

“It all feels...familiar,” he said. “Yet distant. Like a word on the tip of my tongue. But every time I reach for it, it slips away.”

Before I could respond, hurried footsteps echoed down the hall. I turned just in time to see Aaron’s widow burst into the room.

Her eyes locked on him instantly.

“A-aaron?” she whispered, voice trembling.

She darted forward, but Gavin moved at the speed of light and caught her around the waist, nearly lifting her off her feet.

She barely registered the obstruction, her gaze never leaving Aaron’s.

“Oh, goddess,” she sobbed. “It’s true. You’re real. You’re really here.”

Aaron had frozen. Every muscle locked. His breath stuttered.

“I...I know you,” he said slowly, uncertainty bleeding through his tone. “I think.”

Her face crumpled. "It's me," she said desperately. "Imani. Your mate."

The word 'mate' struck him like a blow.

He staggered back a step, hand flying to his chest. "No," he said hoarsely. "That—that doesn't feel right."

I dragged a hand down my face, the headache behind my eyes blooming into something sharp and insistent.

I gritted my teeth. "Get her out of here."

Sera shifted behind me. I felt her focus sharpen, as if she were bracing for impact.

Imani turned to me, eyes wild. "Please," she begged. "Please, Alpha. Let me stay. Let me be with my mate."

I sighed heavily, the weight of my responsibilities pressing down hard on my shoulders.

I looked at Aaron again. At the emptiness in his eyes. The wrongness of him standing here, breathing, when I had buried him in my mind years ago.

And I knew that figuring out whatever this was—whatever had brought him back, whatever had been taken from him in the process—was going to be a fucking nightmare.