

My Sister 345

Chapter 345 PRIVATE AUDIENCE

KIERAN'S POV

The ballroom carried on with its polished rhythm as though the corridors beyond it had not just hummed with threats and poisoned invitations.

Music softened into an anticipatory lull. Laughter rose and fell in curated waves. Servers moved like synchronized dancers, clearing glasses and adjusting centerpieces as the master of ceremonies prepared to call the room to order.

Sera and I had separated ten minutes ago.

She stood between Maya and Ethan, posture relaxed, smile genuine instead of strategic. With them, there was no performance—just comfort, familiarity, and ease.

What I wouldn't give to be in that space right now.

Instead, I stood with two Alphas near the central staircase, discussing moonstone trade quotas and mineral transport routes while my gaze tracked the subtle shifts of the ballroom.

Vidar, I noticed, was absent.

Either he hadn't reentered the main hall yet, or he'd left.

Or the snake was lurking around somewhere else, eavesdropping. Either way, I had eyes on him, ready to report to me if he so much as breathed wrong.

"Alpha."

Gavin's voice cut in low at my shoulder, all business.

I didn't turn. "Report."

"Beta Gunnar of the Iron Hollow Pack has requested a private audience."

It took a beat for the name to register.

Iron Hollow—a small mining pack in the northern borderlands. Inconsequential. Under normal circumstances, I wouldn't have given them a second thought.

Except that according to our intel, Jack Draven was last sighted in Iron Hollow pack before we lost his trail.

“When?” I asked.

“Now,” Gavin replied. “He seems...eager.”

I glanced once more across the room.

As if she could feel my gaze, Sera looked up and our eyes locked briefly.

I gave her the faintest nod.

Fine?

She replied with the smallest lift of her chin.

Fine.

She wasn't a damsel in distress, I reassured myself. I could let her out of my sight for a couple of moments.

I turned back to Gavin. "Stay here, and hold the fort. I'll be back before the host's speech."

He inclined his head.

I slipped from the ballroom through a side corridor, the music fading behind me.

Beta Gunnar was waiting in one of the private reception suites reserved for small delegations.

When I entered, he nearly knocked over the decanter in his haste to stand.

"Alpha Blackthorne," he spluttered, nervous energy radiating off him in uneven waves.

I arched a brow, studying him. He was shorter than I expected. Broad but soft around the edges. Dark hair thinning at the temples.

"You requested a meeting," I said evenly.

“Yes. Yes, of course.” He swallowed, smoothing his jacket with trembling fingers. “It’s an honor, truly. I didn’t anticipate that you would be so gracious—”

“Let’s cut to the chase,” I cut in.

His prepared speech died mid-breath.

“Rogue Jack Draven,” I said, stepping closer, gaze sharp. “His last known location was your pack.”

Gunnar’s eyes widened.

“I—yes,” he admitted quickly. “He did. He was.”

“What did he want?”

Gunnar exhaled shakily. “Shelter. Supplies.”

“And you gave it to him—a rogue who was cast out for violating a sacred common law.”

His jaw tightened defensively. "We are not a powerful pack, Alpha Blackthorne. We mine iron; we don't command legions. Refusing the son of Silverpine's Alpha could bring trouble we cannot fend off. We had to grant him shelter, or risk retribution."

I watched him carefully, but there was nothing deceptive in his aura. Just discomfort and a grudgingly satisfying tinge of fear.

"Tell me about his visit," I commanded.

"He was...audacious," Gunnar said carefully. "Demanding access to our best guest quarters. Throwing out commands as though he still held rank."

Yep, that sounded like Jack.

"And what can you tell me about his visit? His plans? His rogue network?"

Gunnar shook his head. "He didn't stay long, and he shared nothing. Alpha Marcus's men retrieved him personally after a few nights."

I stilled. "Retrieved."

"Yes. Formal escort. We were told he was being reintegrated under supervision."

Reintegrated.

So Marcus was openly reclaiming him now. Interesting.

Even though I already knew the answer, I asked, "And why are you here, Gunnar?"

"My pack wishes to align with Nightfang," Gunnar said earnestly. "We value strength and stability backed by discipline and righteousness."

I scoffed, leaning back. "You're afraid that Marcus, in his volatile nature, will wake up one day and decide that your pack will make a fun little target, and you need protection."

Gunnar ducked his head and said nothing.

Silence thickened in the room as I mulled his proposition over.

An alliance with Iron Hollow would not be mutually beneficial, but instinct told me it would be unwise to turn Gunnar away just yet.

“For now,” I said evenly, “continue as usual. If Marcus makes any sort of move, inform Nightfang immediately.”

Gunnar’s relief was palpable.

“Yes. Of course.” He ducked so far down that his hair almost brushed the floor. “Thank you, Alpha.”

I inclined my head toward the door. “I have a party to get back to.”

As I reached for the handle, Gunnar spoke again.

“Alpha Blackthorne—wait.”

I paused.

“There is...something else,” he said, voice dropping.

My brows rose. “Yes?”

Gunnar straightened, puffing his chest out as if summoning courage.

“As a gesture of sincerity, I’ve prepared a…gift.”

I stared at him. “A gift.”

“Yes. To demonstrate goodwill.”

“What kind of gift?” I asked.

He hesitated. “Best seen in person.”

My instincts sharpened immediately.

“And where is this…gift?”

“In the adjacent suite,” he said quickly. “Prepared privately.”

I glanced once toward the clock over the mantle in the room.

I had minutes before the host's speech.

I turned back to Gunnar. "You do realize that if this is all some kind of ruse and your so-called gift is a trap, I will send you back to your pack in bite-sized pieces."

His Adam's apple bobbed with a hard swallow. "Of course, Alpha. I would never dream of misleading you."

I shrugged. "Lead the way, then."

We stepped into the corridor.

Halfway down, Gunnar slowed.

"My apologies, Alpha," he said awkwardly. "I cannot accompany you further."

I stopped. "Why?"

"It would be...improper."

I shifted my wrist subtly, flexing my fingers twice.

At the signal, two guards moved into position at the far end of the hall, casual but ready.

Gunnar gestured toward the door at the end of the hall.

“There.”

I walked toward it slowly, every sense heightened.

No immediate hostile auras.

No other wolf signatures beyond faint Iron Hollow scents and Nightfang sentinels.

I opened the door and stepped into the dimly lit suite.

The air struck me first—thick with an artificially sweet scent that clung to the back of my throat. Aphrodisiac. Potent enough that I had to steady my breathing before stepping further inside.

My eyes adjusted quickly to the dim lighting, and I saw the figure on the bed—silk barely covering flushed skin, the fabric arranged to reveal more than it concealed. Golden hair spilled over her bare shoulders, her lips parted as uneven breaths slipped free, her pupils blown wide and glassy.

I took it all in for one stunned heartbeat before my brain registered who, exactly, was before me.

Celeste.