

My Sister 353

Chapter 353 PUNCH CARD

SERAPHINA'S POV

Eager as I was to uncover the details of eleven years ago, some truths shouldn't be faced alone. There were two people involved that night.

By the time I reached my car, my phone was already in my hand. I intended to call Kieran to tell him about the USB.

To weigh his instinct against mine before deciding whether to entangle us further in Astrid's web.

But also to watch the way his jaw would tighten at the mention of another of Astrid's "gifts," his possessiveness flaring.

But before I could do anything, a notification banner slid across the screen.

Kieran: Going to Frostbane. Celeste awake and unstable. Will update.

My fingers tightened around the phone.

I'd done my best to push my sister out of my mind. To not consider what her return meant.

But she was awake. And true to character, she was already stirring the pot.

Possessiveness, jealousy, and rage flooded me. I hated it.

Hated that even after everything—after last night, after heat and hunger and unraveling—her name could still pull any sort of reaction from me.

I inhaled, smoothing my psychic barrier before the spike bled outward.

I slid into the driver's seat and started the engine.

It was better to discuss the meeting with Kieran in person anyway.

And if Celeste was awake and unstable, I wanted to see that instability with my own eyes.

The road to Frostbane territory curved through the northern outskirts, the skyline dissolving into dry hills brushed with scrub and stubborn green.

I didn't want to think about Celeste during the drive, and I didn't want to dig deeper into the vision I had last night.

Which left only one track for my train of thought.

My mind replayed Astrid's words.

'It isn't direct proof; that has already been purchased.'

Who would buy the truth of that night only to bury it?

Who benefited from me remaining the villain?

Before I could delve further, unease flickered against my psychic barrier, snapping my attention back to the road.

It curved around a bend, hills rising higher, scrub brush casting skeletal shadows across the asphalt.

Heat shimmered in wavering distortions ahead, blurring distance and environment.

That must've been why I didn't see it in time.

A fallen log lay sprawled across both lanes, thick and splintered, bark stripped in places as if it had been dragged rather than dropped. The surrounding trees stood upright along the ridge, undisturbed.

My instincts fired. I slammed the brakes.

The tires screamed against the asphalt as I skidded to a sharp halt, the car fishtailing slightly before correcting. The scent of burnt rubber curled into the air.

The wind shifted, carrying something metallic. Wild. Rank.

Wrong.

There was a density in the air, as if pressure had thickened, as if something unseen was holding its breath.

Then they stepped out.

One from behind the ridge to my right. Another from the brush on the left. A third emerged from behind the very log that had forced me to stop.

A fourth dropped from the rocky incline to my left, landing lightly on the asphalt.

I sighed. At this point, I should get a punch card: Free frozen yoghurt on your tenth rogue attack!

I turned off the engine and stepped out of the car.

“You’re blocking traffic,” I said mildly, glancing down the empty stretch of road. “That’s inefficient.”

The first—a tall man with a scar slicing across his jaw—smiled without humor. “You’re calmer than last time.”

Last time.

The memory of running, panicked and terrified, flashed through me. Along with recognition.

I mirrored his smile.

“Yes,” I said softly. “I am. And you’re uglier than last time.”

He lunged first.

I moved before he completed the motion.

My heel pivoted against the asphalt, my body twisting sideways as his hand sliced through empty air where my throat had been.

I caught his wrist mid-swing and redirected his momentum, slamming my elbow into his ribs with enough force to crack something.

Behind me, another rogue rushed forward.

I dropped low, sweeping my leg out in a clean arc that knocked him off balance. His skull hit the pavement with a sickening thud.

I felt Alina’s rage surge, but I stamped it down. The silver wolf was not a card I played for roadside theatrics.

The third aimed for my back; I felt him coming.

Psychic threads snapped outward—not enough to expose myself, just enough to distort his equilibrium for half a heartbeat. His vision would blur. His depth perception would falter.

I drove my palm into his sternum and released a concentrated pulse of force that sent him staggering back.

He stared at me, eyes wide.

“You—”

“Yes,” I interrupted, and kicked his knee sideways, reveling in the sound of bone snapping and an accompanying howl of pain.

The leader recovered faster than I anticipated.

His fist collided with my shoulder, the impact reverberating down my arm. Pain bloomed bright and sharp.

I let myself feel it for exactly one second before compartmentalizing it.

I grabbed his collar and slammed my forehead into his nose.

He stumbled back, blood spraying from his nose.

“You picked the wrong morning,” I hissed.

A sharp crack split the air behind me.

More movement.

They came out of the hills in staggered formation—first two, then three more, then another pair cresting the ridge like shadows peeling loose from the earth.

Boots crunched gravel. Steel flashed in the sun. Their scents layered over one another—feral, aggressive, wrong.

The scarred leader’s bloodied mouth curved into something triumphant.

“You think we wouldn’t learn from past mistakes?”

I was too busy counting to answer.

Nine.

Maybe ten.

My shoulder throbbed where he'd struck me. My lungs burned from exertion.

One of the newcomers twirled a blade lazily between his fingers. Another cracked his neck side to side. They spread out subtly, not rushing, tightening the perimeter inch by inch.

For a brief, razor-thin second, I considered shifting. I could tear through them in seconds, but if any survived, then the truth of Alina's identity would be exposed.

No.

Not an option.

The scarred rogue wiped blood from his nose with the back of his hand.

"Still calm?" he taunted.

My heart pounded hard enough to bruise from the inside, but my face remained smooth.

I didn't want to go down. But if I had to, it wouldn't be without a fight.

I rolled my shoulders, grounding myself, feeling every muscle—even the aching ones—align.

“Come,” I said.

They did.

The first rushed from my left. I pivoted, driving my elbow into his throat before he could fully extend his strike. Another grabbed my hair; I twisted, wrenching his wrist backward until something tore. A third clipped my thigh, pain flaring hot and immediate.

More closed in.

Too many.

A blade sliced close, grazing fabric at my waist. I ducked, kicked, struck—efficient, ruthless—but every body I dropped was replaced by another pressing forward.

They were forcing me to the center.

Forcing me down.

Gravel bit into my palm as I stumbled, catching myself before I fell fully to one knee. A boot slammed into my ribs, knocking the breath from my lungs.

The world narrowed.

Alina surged again, furious at the restraint. My vision edged with something brighter, sharper.

'Let me out!'

'No! I'll die before I risk you.'

I pushed myself upright, blood metallic on my tongue.

One more step forward. One more strike. Go down fighting.

Then a howl ripped through the air.

Dark shapes burst from the treeline like unleashed shadows. Nightfang guards moved with brutal precision, weapons flashing, bodies colliding with rogues in controlled violence.

The pressure around me fractured instantly.

One rogue was tackled mid-swing. Another disarmed so fast his blade hadn't finished its arc. A third went down under coordinated strikes that left no room for recovery.

The tide didn't just shift.

It flipped.

And for the first time since the log hit the road, I allowed myself a single steady breath.

The scarred leader's triumphant expression collapsed as he realized that, again, he'd lost.

He snarled and feinted left before sprinting right, aiming for the narrow path between boulders that led up into the hills.

I shoved the nearest rogue into the asphalt and took off after him.

“Lady Sera!” someone called behind me.

I ignored it and forced my aching muscles to run.

The rogue was fast. His strides were sure-footed, familiar with the terrain.

He vaulted over a low rock formation, and I followed, lungs burning, adrenaline electric in my bloodstream. Gravel skidded beneath my shoes as we climbed higher.

I reached for that psychic thread again, stretching it thinner this time, aiming to destabilize his motor coordination without fully exposing myself.

But then something slammed into him.

Not me.

Not a guard.

The rogue flew backward mid-stride, body twisting unnaturally before crashing into the dirt at my feet as I skidded to a halt.

He groaned, trying to scramble up. A boot came down on his spine, pressing him flat.

I lifted my gaze, and my eyes widened, an incredulous breath slipping out of me.

Sea-green and blue eyes twinkled at me.

“Never a dull moment with you, huh?” Corin said.