

My Sister 355

Chapter 355 SO-CALLED STRATEGY

KIERAN'S POV

Marcus Draven might not have sent parchment. He might not have stood in a council chamber and issued a formal challenge.

But funding rogue units to target my mate...

"Marcus has declared war."

I stood in Frostbane's strategy room, palms braced against the long oak table scarred by generations of Alpha disputes, and let the fury cool and sharpen into a blade of ice.

"You have no proof of Marcus' involvement," Ethan pointed out. "It's their word against his."

I nodded. "True. Which is why I'm mobilizing the western patrols. I'm placing them just outside Silverpine borders, breathing down their necks. If a rogue so much as sets foot on Silverpine land, that establishes association. And association with rogues violates inter-pack law. That gives me grounds. Grounds for formal censure. Grounds for sanctioned retaliation."

I let the words settle.

“Then we attack.”

Ethan’s disapproval was obvious in the crease between his brows, the tightening of his jaw, and the way his arms crossed tightly. “You’re escalating.”

“He made the first move,” I replied. “I’m responding.”

“No.”

My head turned slowly towards the voice.

Corin stood across the table from me, arms loosely at his sides, gaze steady.

“Excuse me?” I said, voice low.

“No,” he repeated, unapologetic and firm. “Not like that.”

“And how exactly are you involved in Nightfang’s military decisions?”

Sera moved at that point, and her hand came down over mine on the table.

"I agree," she said quietly.

I turned to her, my eyebrows rising.

"You agree," I echoed, my words trembling despite my effort to sound composed.

Her gaze did not waver. "Not like that."

Something sharp flared in my chest that had nothing to do with Marcus.

"You've known him for what," I asked her, "a handful of weeks? And you're taking his side over mine?"

She shook her head. "That's not what this is."

"That's exactly what it feels like," I said, the edge no longer fully concealed.

"I just want you to be cautious."

I straightened, drawing my hands back from the table, jaw tight enough to ache.

“I will not sit idle while another Alpha orchestrates attacks on my mate.”

“No one is asking you to sit idle,” Sera said, her voice lower now, careful. “I’m asking you not to charge blind. I don’t want you to lose.”

“I never lose.”

Her eyes glinted silver for an instant.

“Not yet,” she whispered.

The room went still.

“Explain,” I demanded.

“Just now, as you were laying out your plan,” she began, “I saw something.”

Something tightened under my ribs as I remembered the last time she saw 'something.'

"Saw what?"

"If you retaliate," she said. "It will end badly for Nightfang. For you."

My jaw clenched. "How?"

It was Corin who answered. "Marcus lets you attack, but he doesn't meet you head-on. The rogues will be on the front line, so he'll suffer no loss, and then the narrative will spread: You escalated without proof. You become the aggressor. You look impulsive. Unstable. And once that perception settles, your allies start having doubts. They start to recalculate."

"And while you're focused on putting out those fires," Sera added, "he makes his next move."

Corin's gaze shifted pointedly to Sera. "He hits you where it hurts."

The air in the room thinned.

"You think you won today by capturing the rogues?" Corin continued. "All you did was take the first step into Marcus' carefully laid trap."

“They were bait,” Sera said softly. “If you retaliate now, you walk into the next one.”

I exhaled through my teeth.

It wasn't the criticism that cut deepest. It was the sync between them. The shared cadence. The unspoken understanding I wasn't part of.

I could tolerate challenge. I could tolerate disagreement. What I could not tolerate was an outsider finding harmony with my mate before I did.

“You expect me to believe Marcus orchestrated this entire sequence? That he's anticipated my response?” I demanded.

“I expect you to consider that he's not stupid,” Corin replied.

I stepped toward him.

“You don't know Marcus.”

“No,” Corin agreed calmly. “But I know strategy.”

My fist curled. “And how do I know that you’re not another piece of bait? That you’re not a part of Marcus’ so-called strategy?”

Sera inhaled sharply. “Kieran—”

“You said it yourself, your timing was impeccable. How do I know you’re not the next trap?”

Sera’s grip tightened on my forearm.

“Enough,” she snapped.

Corin’s expression didn’t change.

“That’s fair,” he said. “You shouldn’t trust me. You don’t know me.”

That answer disarmed me more than a denial would have.

Ethan stepped forward then, voice cutting through the tension.

“Instead of plotting strategies against Marcus, we should be figuring out his motive first.”

All three of us turned to him.

“You banished Jack,” he said plainly. “Publicly. Marcus lost face because of it.”

“He should have handled his son,” I replied.

“Yes,” Ethan agreed. “But pride and logic are antonyms.”

I didn’t need that explained to me.

Marcus and I had clashed long before Jack’s banishment. Ideology. Territory disputes. Trade routes. We had never liked each other.

Ethan continued, "It’s no surprise he wants to hurt you. The real question is, how did he pivot to Sera? When did he learn about her abilities? How much does he know? Rogues have been attacking her long before the unsealing, so is there something else? How does he keep ambushing her? Is she a means to get to you, or is she his real target?"

Corin cleared his throat, drawing our attention back to him. “There’s something you should know.”

“What?”

He hesitated, his gaze falling on Sera again. It took all of my willpower not to position myself between them.

“On the psychic network,” he said carefully, “you’re a hot topic.”

Sera stiffened, her hands clenched at her sides. A chill crawled down my spine.

“Psychics are...territorial,” he continued. “Competitive. Suspicious of anything that disrupts hierarchy.”

Sera didn’t move, but I heard the slight hitch in her breath.

“Psychics are usually identified very young, so when someone rises out of the blue,” Corin went on, “especially someone powerful and unanchored, it draws attention. Not so much the admiring kind.”

“Jealousy,” Ethan muttered.

“Worse,” Corin corrected. “Fear disguised as principle.”

Silence pressed in around us.

“They talk,” he said. “They speculate. They measure threat levels. They ask who trained her, who controls her, who she answers to, why she’s only just emerging.”

Sera’s jaw hardened at that.

“And when those answers aren’t satisfactory,” he finished, “they start discussing...neutralization.”

The word detonated in my skull.

Sera swallowed, and her voice was rough when she spoke. “That’s why you’re really here.”

Corin nodded, his gaze softening when he looked at her.

“On our way here, we stopped at the New Moon Institute to help with the fire. Alois insisted I go ahead while Maris and Brett helped. The Hunting Festival is secondary, Sera. I’m here to protect you.”