

My Sister 363

Chapter 363 ALTERED PERCEPTION

ETHAN'S POV

Kieran's call so early in the morning set me on edge.

The message made things worse. "Bring Celeste to Nightfang. Now."

The command was clipped, edged, the strain in his voice hinting that his control was wearing dangerously thin.

Anger under ice.

Everything was still raw from the Hunting Festival, the rogues, the trap with Celeste drugged and staged, the growing evidence that someone was targeting Sera.

Now...whatever this was.

Celeste was unstable; that was the kindest word for it. Since admitting her wolf was gone—silenced or severed or worse—she'd been oscillating between brittle composure and jagged hostility.

Bringing her into Nightfang in her current state would have been like tossing a lit match into dry timber.

So, no, I didn't bring her.

Corin, thankfully, agreed without argument when I asked that he remain at Frostbane with Celeste and keep an eye on her.

Then I set out for Nightfang with Maya.

When we arrived, the air itself felt wrong.

There's a difference between tension and grief. Tension hums. Grief drags.

This dragged.

Kieran met us in the foyer. He looked composed. But his eyes were darker than usual, not with rage, but with something heavier.

His gaze flickered behind us, but he didn't comment on Celeste's absence.

“Sera’s upstairs,” he said instead.

I followed him to the guest suite in the Alpha wing and found Sera sitting at the desk, laptop open, screen paused on a frame I couldn’t quite make out.

She turned when we walked in, and I stilled.

Seraphina Lockwood had never been physically imposing, but ever since she’d been unsealed, power radiated from her like heat from asphalt in summer.

Now that power felt compressed inward, imploding rather than expanding, making her seem diminished.

“Watch,” she said, her voice too steady for the storm in her eyes.

I watched.

Silence enveloped the room as the videos played, one after the other, and the narrative I had believed for eleven years shattered in front of me.

Only when the screen went black, cutting off as Sera and Kieran stumbled into the room, did I take a breath.

Maya whirled on Kieran. "So it's true. You really did make the first move?"

Sera sighed. "That's not the point, Maya."

The absolute devastation in my sister's voice gave Maya pause. She moved toward her best friend and placed a hand on her shoulder, her brows drawn in concern. "There's more, isn't there?"

Sera wordlessly turned back to the laptop and opened another file.

This one was different. An office. Shadowed figure. Distorted voice.

"I will purchase the full archive."

I felt something shift inside me as I watched the envelope slide across the desk, recognizing the familiar cadence despite the filter.

When the screen went still, the silence in the room was suffocating.

For a long moment, no one spoke.

I couldn't defend Celeste. She'd crossed that line a long time ago.

But I had believed our father was stern, strategic, political to a fault—but not cruel. Not willing to bury one daughter's innocence to cover the other's guilt.

Now that evidence scorched the silence between us.

But instinct refused to accept the simplest interpretation.

"Sera," I began carefully, "this was before your seal was removed."

Kieran's gaze flicked to me, sharp. "What are you insinuating?"

"I'm not excusing this," I added quickly. "I'm saying...we have to consider whether they were also operating under altered perception."

Sera's expression cracked. "You think they were influenced?"

"I think we've seen enough evidence of psychic manipulation in the last month to not rule anything out."

"I've seen Celeste since the seal was broken," she pointed out. "She was the same. Worse, if that's possible."

"But we have no way of knowing the extent of the effect the sealing had on Father."

"He watched it," she whispered. "He saw. He knew."

"Yes."

"And he still buried it."

That, I couldn't deny.

I moved closer, lowering my voice. "I don't have the perfect words to articulate this, but when the seal was removed, it was like scales dropping from my eyes. Like I was seeing you for the first time. As if my mind was only just processing that you were my sister, that I was supposed to love you."

Her eyes flickered—hurt surfacing and vanishing, quick as a pulse.

“Father made a terrible decision,” I continued. “But I don’t believe he meant to hurt you. Not intentionally, at least.”

Sera’s composure wavered, lips quivering, shoulders caving as if she was fighting not to cry.

For a heartbeat, I saw the younger version of her—the girl who stood at the edge of rooms and was never invited in.

The girl that I couldn’t bring myself to care about, and I never understood why.

“I just...I can’t believe he knew,” she whispered.

“I know.”

Her throat bobbed with a swallow.

Maya leaned down and wrapped her arms around Sera’s shoulders from behind, offering silent comfort.

“There’s another angle to consider,” I added quietly.

Kieran's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

"Why now?" I asked, gesturing to the laptop. "We don't know exactly when this happened, but why surface now—not eleven years ago, not five, not last year when he died, and the attacks began? Now, when Sera's power is growing, and enemies are circling."

Understanding dawned in Kieran's expression. "You think this was delivered strategically."

"I think," I said carefully, "that if someone fears her growth, the most efficient way to weaken her isn't physical. It's emotional."

Sera stilled.

"And this," I gestured to the laptop, "is devastating."

SERAPHINA'S POV

Ethan's words couldn't dull the ache in my chest—the grief throbbed, electric and raw. But they cut through the haze for a moment, sharpening the edge of reality.

There was a chance—however small, however ludicrous—that this was less about betrayal and more about warfare.

I drew in a slow breath and reached for my phone. My fingers hesitated for half a second over Corin's name before I pressed it.

If there was even a possibility that this had been engineered—timed, curated, delivered like a blade to the heart—I needed clarity from someone who understood the architecture of psychic interference better than anyone in this room.

The call connected almost immediately. The screen flickered, then steadied, filling with Corin's face.

He took one look at me and exhaled.

"You look terrible," he teased, though his gaze sharpened as it traced the tear tracks I hadn't bothered to hide.

I could see my own reflection in the corner of the screen—eyes red, skin pale, grief leaking through every crack. There was no point pretending, not to Corin.

"I feel worse," I replied, my voice thin.

He leaned back slightly, bracing his elbow on what looked like the arm of a chair. “What happened?”

I swallowed. “I’m sending you a video. Watch it, and then answer something for me.”

Without waiting for permission, I lowered the phone and reached for my laptop. My hands were steadier now than they had been an hour ago.

I pulled up the encrypted file, selected the relevant clips, and hit share.

The progress bar crawled across the screen. For a moment, the only sound in the room was the faint hum of the laptop.

“Check your messages,” I said.

Corin’s eyes shifted downward as his phone chimed. The video call window shrank as he opened the files. I watched his expression as the footages began to play on his end.

His posture straightened. His jaw tightened almost imperceptibly. When the distorted voice said, ‘I will purchase the full archive,’ his gaze flicked back up to me briefly, then returned to the screen.

When it was over, he did not immediately speak.

I held his eyes through the screen and asked, "Can psychics forge evidence to that degree?"

"In general, falsifying physical archives is extremely difficult," he answered after a beat. "However...we can implant suggestive tendencies. Alter perception. Encourage certain decisions."

My pulse leapt, a hammer in my veins.

"You think someone could have influenced him?"

"I think," Corin replied carefully, "that if your father was already predisposed to prioritize reputation, nudging him toward suppression wouldn't require rewriting his mind. Only amplifying what was already there."

That was worse somehow.

"And Celeste? Could she have been influenced, too?"

Or was my sister just an evil bitch through and through?

Corin paused for a long while.

And then: "We may need to speak to Brett."

My brows knit together. "Brett? Why? What does he have to do with this?"

"There are connections you're not aware of," Corin said softly. "And Brett has something he intended to confess to you during this trip anyway."

I frowned harder. "What?"

"It's not my story to tell," he replied. "If you allow it, I'll ask him and Maris to come directly to Nightfang. They just landed. I can fill them in on the way."

I hesitated for the second it took to look at Kieran and receive his permission.

"Bring them."