

My Sister 397

Chapter 397: GONE

ETHAN'S POV

The unease began before we even reached the gates.

It settled into me gradually, like a pressure building beneath the skin. Not intense enough to name, but too persistent to ignore.

Frostbane rose ahead of us exactly as it always had—stone walls unbroken, watchtowers manned, the banners along the outer ridge lifting and falling with the night wind—but something in the air felt...displaced.

Like a scent that didn't belong had soaked into the bones of the land.

I slowed as we passed through the gates, scanning the courtyard, measuring what I saw against what I expected to see.

Warriors were still in motion, but there was no urgency to them, no visible strain of a battle hard-fought.

The ground bore only faint signs of disruption—disturbed gravel, a few shallow marks where claws might have struck, nothing deep enough to suggest a sustained fight.

Beside me, Maya exhaled under her breath. “If this was an attack,” she murmured, “it wasn’t meant to break anything.”

Behind us, Brett let out a sharp breath. “So what—just a warning shot?”

“Corin?” I asked, glancing at him through the rearview mirror. “What do you think?”

Corin didn’t answer immediately. His eyes were half-lidded, distant in that way they got when he was reaching beyond the physical, brushing against currents no one else could see.

“There’s residue,” he said at last, voice low. “Not strong. Not like what we felt at the coast. But it’s here.” His gaze lifted to mine. “It was less of an attack and more of a...diversion.”

A diversion.

Not a failed attack. Not a weakened attempt.

A deliberate misdirection.

My chest tightened.

“But why?” Maris asked. “What could they possibly have to gain by a distraction?”

The question hung between us, waiting to be answered.

If Catherine had split her attention, if she had orchestrated simultaneous pressure—albeit of different levels—on both packs, what was her endgame?

I grabbed my phone and called Kieran.

He picked up on the second ring.

“Ethan.”

“What happened at Nightfang?” I asked.

A brief pause followed, the kind born of choosing words with care.

Then he gave me the summary of what happened.

When he was done, I exhaled heavily, running a hand over my face.

“And the damage?” I asked.

“Minimal physically,” Kieran said. “Psychologically... not as clean.”

“And Sera?” I asked.

“She’ll be fine. What’s happening on your end?”

I exhaled slowly. “We had an attack here, too.”

“Scale?” Kieran asked.

“Small,” I said. “Controlled. No real attempt to breach.”

Another pause.

Then, more sharply, “That wasn’t an attack.”

“No,” I agreed.

“So,” he said. “If Catherine’s goal was to sow confusion in my pack, what was her goal in yours?”

I didn’t answer immediately.

Because the comparison was settling into place.

Nightfang—pressure, disruption, psychological damage.

Frostbane—minimal force, just enough to draw attention outward.

Two fronts.

Two different intensities.

What did Frostbane have that Catherine could possibly want?

I was already moving before the thought fully finished forming.

“Ethan?” Maya called after me.

I didn’t slow down.

Footsteps echoed behind me as I hurried across the courtyard, weaving past posted sentries and pushing open the main building’s heavy door without looking back.

Warriors and pack members greeted me as I passed, but I barely acknowledged them.

“Alpha—” one of the sentries called, stepping forward as if to report.

“Alpha, we’ve secured the north perimeter—” another voice cut in from the side.

A younger pack member moved into my path, hesitating just long enough to show he wasn’t sure if he should stop me. “Alpha, after the attack—”

I didn’t slow down.

Didn't stop.

Didn't answer.

Their voices overlapped behind me, fragments of updates and questions trailing in my wake, but none of them mattered right now.

Inside, the air was warmer, quieter, but the same wrongness lingered beneath it.

Pack members moved through the halls, some carrying supplies, others speaking in low voices, their eyes flickering toward me as I passed.

"Alpha—" one of the guards started when I appeared at the end of the hall.

"Where is she?" I snapped.

He blinked, caught off guard. "Who?"

"Celeste!"

“I—I thought she was in her quarters—”

I didn't wait for him to finish.

The corridor stretched ahead of me, too long, too narrow, every step echoing louder than it should have.

My pulse had already started to climb, a steady, controlled escalation that I refused to let tip into panic.

Not yet.

Not until I had reason.

But the silence ahead of me didn't help.

Neither did the absence of any scent I could immediately place.

Celeste's door came into view.

Closed.

No guards.

My jaw tightened.

I shoved the door open so forcefully that it rebounded off the wall with a sharp crack that echoed through the room.

The empty room.

For a second, my mind rejected what I was seeing.

I stood frozen, staring at the bed, the window, the untouched surfaces that offered no immediate explanation.

There was no scent of blood, no sign of forced entry, no lingering trace of violence.

There was also no Celeste.

No.

No, no, no.

I stepped fully into the room, my gaze sweeping across every corner, every surface, searching for something—anything—that would make this make sense.

“Celeste,” I called, even though I knew there was no one to answer.

Silence.

Behind me, footsteps approached.

“What—” Maya stopped short in the doorway. “She’s not here?”

“No,” I said.

Brett moved past her, scanning the room with a frown. “Maybe she snuck out during the attack—”

“No,” I replied, my voice low and trembling. “She was secured.”

“And she wouldn’t leave without someone noticing,” Maya said, though there was uncertainty in her tone now.

She was right; Celeste wasn’t the kind to disappear quietly.

Even when she ran, even when she made reckless decisions, there was always noise. Always conflict. Always something left behind.

This—

This absence was too clean.

My mind moved quickly, assembling the pieces whether I wanted it to or not.

Small-scale attack.

Minimal damage.

A distraction.

My stomach sank.

“They weren’t here for a fight,” I said slowly.

“They were here to make sure our forces were occupied,” I continued, the logic locking into place with cold, brutal clarity, “while something else happened.”

“Ethan,” Brett said, a warning edge creeping into his voice. “Don’t jump to conclusions—”

“I’m not,” I snapped.

Because I could already see the pattern

Catherine didn’t waste resources.

She didn’t move without purpose.

If she had touched Frostbane at all, it was for a reason.

And there was only one reason that mattered enough.

My fists clenched at my sides.

“She’s gone,” I said.

The words tasted wrong.

Final. Unacceptable.

“No,” Maya said immediately, shaking her head. “No, we don’t know that—”

“She’s gone,” I repeated, sharper this time.

A flicker of memory cut through me before I could stop it.

Celeste in her bed, chained, chin lifted in defiance even then.

Celeste in front of the mirror, Sera forcing her to look at herself.

Celeste's voice, brittle and furious, insisting she hadn't lost to Sera.

My chest tightened.

For all her antagonism, for all her wrongdoing, she had still been under my protection.

And I failed her.