

My Sister 135

Chapter 135 THE MISTY WOODS

SERAPHINA'S POV

All the Arenas were clever illusions and simulations. But it was hard to remember that when we stepped into the Misty Woods.

It breathed like a living thing, and every step forward pulled us deeper into its lungs. The fog swirled thicker until the world dulled into muted grays and greens.

The air clung to my skin with a dampness that seeped beneath my jacket, the bitter tang of herbs stinging the back of my throat.

Somewhere above, I sensed the outline of the sun trying and failing to burn through the haze. Its light was scattered like shards of glass.

We'd been carefully and explicitly given the rules at the gate, but I'd simplified it in my head, reciting those, too, like incantations: three Moonstone Shards, twelve hours, finish line.

The first nine teams would pass. The rest would be out of the competition.

The fog was supposed to be crucial to the trial—a concoction brewed from a blend of ground herbs that tampered with the mind and senses.

It blurred vision, muffled scent trails, distorted balance.

For most wolves, it was crippling.

But not for me. Not really.

The ache of loss knotted sharp in my chest as I thought of it—of her. My wolf.

She would've probably hated this fog, would've snarled against the confusion it spun.

But without her, my senses were stripped down to human dullness. The fog rolled in, but it found little to corrupt. I was spared the worst of its bite.

So were the others—Omegas, whose wolves weren't strong enough to register much of the interference in the first place.

Talia, though still fidgeting nervously, didn't stumble as others did in the distance. Finn moved with a strange steadiness, his hand brushing against tree trunks as though cataloguing them in his mind.

Even Judy, though her wolf twitched at the edges, seemed unbothered.

The irony wasn't lost on me.

Lucian had designed this—I knew it in my gut. He'd chosen this fog, this challenge.

But what for? To even the playing field? To show us that our disadvantage could be turned into leverage?

Or just to test the depths of our weakness?

The forest whispered no answers back, only the rustle of leaves and the occasional, distant crack of a branch snapping under another team's weight.

We found the first Moonstone Shard within the first hour.

It was wedged into the trunk of a dead tree, its pale glow faint through the fog, like moonlight bleeding through water.

Judy yanked it free with a triumphant whoop, brandishing it high. The shard pulsed faintly in her palm, runes etched along its edge humming with power.

“One down!” She grinned, teeth flashing, eyes bright despite the haze.

“Two to go,” I reminded, though a thrill spread through me at her joy.

We pressed on, weaving deeper into the woods, through marshy patches that sucked at our boots and over ridges where jagged stones jutted like teeth.

My lungs burned with exertion. My fingers flexed unconsciously around the entry pass tucked into my jacket pocket next to Maya’s moonstone.

It was during our search for the second shard that the trouble began.

Roxy lagged at the back, her movements agitated and restless, like a wolf pacing the bars of a cage. I felt her stare drilling into my spine.

When she finally spoke, her voice was thick with venom.

“It’s cute how hard you’re trying,” she said, voice low but cutting through the fog, “but you’ll always be just a replacement.”

I turned slightly, enough to catch her out of the corner of my eye. She’s stopped, leaning against a boulder slick with moss, her arms crossed, a sneer curling her lips.

“What do you mean?” Judy snapped, bristling.

“She knows exactly what I mean,” Roxy said, eyes locked on me. “Jessica told me all about it—how Lucian once had a mate he actually loved. You’ll never be her, you know. You’re just...the stand-in.”

Her words slithered through me like smoke, curling into the cracks where my heart was still healing.

My chest clenched, a flash of memories playing in my mind.

The conviction with which Lucian explained the mate bond. The dark, brief shadows that crossed his face. The longing in his tone when he talked about his...friend.

I folded my arms. “Tell me more about this so-called mate.”

Roxy faltered. “I-I never met her, but Jessica—”

Right. Jessica. I wasn’t stupid enough to believe anything that came from Celeste 2.0’s mouth.

I forced my breathing steady, my gaze steady. “If you think repeating Jessica’s words will unsettle me, you’ll have to try harder.”

I kept my tone cool, flat. Inside, my heart thudded harder than I liked.

Roxy's eyes narrowed at my calm. Frustration sharpened her features.

I could see how badly she wanted me rattled, cracked open.

When she realized I wasn't giving her that, her lip curled further, and she went for the jugular.

"Fine," she spat. "Then let's talk about who you really are."

She glanced around at the rest of our team, who had stopped in their tracks and watched our interaction with bated breath. "Do you all know the truth about your precious leader?" she sneered. "About how she used underhanded tricks to force an Alpha into marriage?"

My breath hitched, and she smirked, leaning in close. "How he threw you away like the pathetic whore you are. And now? You're trying to latch onto Lucian—who, again, belongs to someone else." Her voice rose, slicing through the fog. "Pathetic."

"You shut your filthy—" Outrage sparked in Judy's expression, and she lunged forward, fists clenched, but I caught her arm before she could reach Roxy.

“Don’t,” I murmured.

This was my fight.

And then I moved.

In two strides, I had Roxy pinned against a mossy boulder, my forearm pressed hard against her throat.

Her eyes blew wide, her hands scrabbling against my arm as she choked, the fog spilling in and out of her lungs raggedly.

“You talk a lot,” I said, voice steady, almost conversational. “But this”—I pressed harder, enough to make her wheeze—“this is what you’ve got? Baseless rumors? Insults? Is this the strength you claimed would lead us?”

She gurgled, her fingers clawing uselessly at my jacket.

I could see her wolf flickering in her eyes, but in a chokehold, no wolf could shift. And apparently, contrary to all her boasting, she wasn’t stronger than me.

Her bravado drained with every breath she couldn’t take, panic flickering in her gaze.

I leaned close, close enough that only she would hear. "If you can't learn to shut that mouth, I will exercise my authority as leader and remove you from this team. Right fucking now. Which means you'll be disqualified from the competition entirely. Would you like that?"

Her eyes flared wide, the fight slipping from her.

"No?" I mused. "I didn't think so. So you're going to put a muzzle on and we're going to get through this as a team." I increased the pressure on her throat ever so slightly. "Right?"

Slowly, stiffly, she nodded.

I held her a beat longer, long enough to sear the message into her brain, then released her with a shove.

She staggered forward, coughing, clutching her throat.

Behind me, Judy muttered, "Damn."

Talia's face had gone pale as parchment. Finn's gaze flicked to me, unreadable.

Roxy hunched, wheezing, but the fury hadn't left her. It blazed hot in her eyes, even more than before.

“You’ll regret that,” she rasped, voice raw. Then she spat at the ground and turned sharply, storming into the fog.

“I don’t need this sorry excuse of a team,” she snarled over her shoulder. “I’ll find the shards myself.”

Her figure dissolved into the haze until nothing remained but the echo of her footsteps and the weight of her words hanging between us.

Silence followed, heavy and uneasy.

Talia wrung her hands, glancing at me. “Should we—should we go after her?”

Finn shifted, his expression tight. “She could jeopardize us if she runs into another team.”

I drew a slow breath, forcing calm into my coiled muscles. “Let her go.”

Both their heads snapped toward me.

“What?” Talia whispered.

“She needs space to cool off,” I said firmly. “Chasing her now will only make it worse. Besides,” —I gestured to the fog around us, the endless trees—“we’re all looking for the same shards. Our paths will cross again.”

Judy studied me, brow furrowed, but her mouth twitched like she wanted to grin. “Well, damn, Sera. Remind me never to piss you off.”

I ignored her, though the smallest smirk tugged at my lips before I could stop it.

Still, as we pressed on, the echo of Roxy’s insults gnawed at me like a wolf at bone. Replacement. Pathetic. Whore.

I set my jaw and pushed forward.

We had a mission to fulfill.

And I’d be damned before I let her—or anyone else—decide what I was worth.