

My Sister 142

Chapter 142 THE RESONANT LABYRINTH

SERAPHINA'S POV

For a long time, I just sat there in the dark, hugging my knees and staring out at nothing.

My vision warped as hot tears slid down my cheeks unhindered. My father's voice lingered like smoke after a fire—soft, elusive.

'You were always meant for more.'

I closed my eyes and pressed the heels of my palms against my lids as if I could hold onto him if I just pressed hard enough.

But the dream was already rapidly fading—an echo I couldn't chase down, no matter how hard I tried.

When I opened my eyes, all that greeted me was the gradual, dim wash of dawn spilling in through the cracks of my blinds.

And the worst part? Confusion tangled with the yawning ache in my chest.

I couldn't tell if my dream was a memory or...invention.

Had my father truly said those words to me once, in the garden of my childhood?

Or was I so starved for comfort, had I been so triggered by my mother's visit and that damn pie, that my mind had conjured those tender moments wholesale?

Whenever I dared to summon thoughts of my father, all that surfaced were the harsh, malicious glares he always shot at me, as if I were his greatest mistake. All I could remember was the cruel anger in his voice as he disowned me.

'From this day forward, you are no daughter of mine.'

'Your birth was a mistake, Seraphina.'

How could that have been the same man in my dream, stroking my hair and telling me I was precious?

An anguished groan tore out of my throat as I dragged my hands down my face. I couldn't afford emotional turmoil like this. Not today.

Memory or illusion, both were dangerous, and I couldn't afford to have them soften or dull my edges when I needed them sharp.

I needed to get my ass out of bed, clear my mind, and face what the day had in store for me.

Because today was the second challenge of the LST.

The second Arena was called the Resonant Labyrinth.

The entrance yawned before us, a maw of shifting walls that ground against each other with a groan like mountains waking.

Towering slabs slid and re-formed with the patience of melting glaciers, but the precision of clockwork.

It was basically a gigantic puzzle cut out of stone.

While the Misty Woods had been an Arena of muscle and reflex and instinct, this one required us to rely on our minds more than anything else.

Once again, I'd ingested the instructions and chanted them back to myself repeatedly: Six hours. Navigate the maze. Reach the Echo Altar at the center. Strike the correct sequence. Escape.

Safe to say, this new weight pressed on my lungs like a vice.

The walls were etched with strange markings—curves and slashes, dots and crescents, spirals that pulsed faintly as if they had been carved with living flame.

At first glance, the symbols looked like abstract art, something one might dismiss as decoration.

But they were crucial to the challenge—they held the sequence that would release us from the maze.

“Hell of a place,” Roxy muttered, cracking her knuckles like she was preparing to punch her way through the walls of stone.

Her reflection gleamed faintly in the polished wall. “Bet I could smash through three turns in and shave hours off our time.”

Oh gods, she was actually considering it?

I bit back a sigh. “Or trigger every trap in the maze and bury us all alive.”

She shot me a sharp look. I returned it with an arched brow.

We'd had such a nice time after the last trial. I really hoped we wouldn't so quickly revert to our initial dynamic.

Judy rolled her eyes. "How about we try brains before brawn, yeah?"

Finn had already stepped closer to the wall, fingers hovering just shy of the symbols.

His eyes narrowed in concentration. "These aren't random." His voice was low, reverent almost. "They're notation."

I blinked at him. "Like...musical notation?"

He nodded, his lips twitching at the corners in a show of rare excitement. "Ancient wolf tribe music. My grandfather taught me to recognize fragments. I've only ever seen scraps in books—but this is an entire lexicon."

I leaned closer, my pulse quickening as I recognized some of the markings. He was right. The arrangement wasn't arbitrary; the lines repeated in measured intervals, dots clustered like staccato notes.

It was rhythm—a language of sound carved into stone.

I knew the books Finn referred to; the Lockwood library had been full of them, and I'd had plenty of alone time to peruse through a bunch.

My mind immediately began to work, patterns sparking like tinder catching flame. "If the walls are notation...then the Altar's passcode must be a composition."

Finn shifted to the other side of the maze, squinting at little raised grooves, almost like buttons, with markings that matched the notes on our side.

He pressed one, and a resonant ding rang through the air.

He leaned back, nodding to himself. "You're right, Sera. Each corresponding note should lead us through the maze, and the culmination should be the final sequence."

I smiled, cracking my neck. "Right then. Let's get to work."

We quickly divided roles.

Finn and I became the codebreaking duo, our eyes fixed on the walls, trading rapid theories and testing patterns against memory.

He pointed out symbols I didn't recognize, explaining their meaning, their tempo. In return, I aligned them into sequences, measuring beats with my fingertips against my thigh.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the passages, Judy was on guard duty, scanning for threats from other teams, while Talia, acting as operator, pressed symbols as I called them out.

Each one responded with a tone—sometimes warm and resonant, sometimes shrill enough to make us wince.

We worked like that in harmony, a rhythm of our own making—until, of course, we were interrupted.

Behind us, Roxy groaned audibly. “So what, we crawl through the maze as the two of you hum little songs until something clicks? This is a waste of time.”

“Feel free to wander off again, Roxy,” I said flatly, not looking back. “I wonder what trap or peril we’ll have to pull you out of this time.”

That shut her up. Though I felt her glare boring into the back of my head.

“Again,” I said to Talia, gesturing toward a spiral etched low on the wall.

She obeyed, striking it with two fingers. A deep hum filled the corridor, vibrating up through my boots.

“Yes,” Finn breathed. “That’s the tonic note. We’ve completed the foundation.”

I smiled. We were making progress.

The new path forked into three tunnels, each one lined with a different set of glowing etchings. I was still studying the nearest wall, tracing a sequence with my fingertip, when Roxy lost patience. Again.

“This is pointless,” she snapped. “We’ll be here all damn day if we continue like this.”

She planted a hand on one wall and shoved hard, as if sheer force could make the stone reveal its secrets.

“Roxy, wait—!” I started, but I was too late.

The symbols beneath her palm flared blood-red. A grinding roar tore through the corridor, followed by a hiss that raised every hair on my neck.

From the ceiling above, dozens of thin slits snapped open. A volley of needle-like darts whistled downward.

“Down!” I shouted.

We threw ourselves flat against the ground. One dart sliced through the air so close to my ear that the wind burned.

Another nicked Roxy’s arm, tearing fabric but—thank the gods—not flesh. The stone floor rattled as the barrage clattered around us, embedding into walls with vicious cracks.

The assault ended just as suddenly as it had begun. Silence fell, save for everyone’s harsh breathing.

“Everyone okay?” I panted.

Roxy scrambled up, her face pale, her bravado shaken. “I—”

“Don’t,” I hissed.

I rose slowly, wincing at the ache in my ribs from the harsh landing. I brushed dust from my jacket and fixed her with a level stare. “We’re not going through this all over again, Roxy. This isn’t just you stuck in a swamp. You almost got us killed because you couldn’t stand to wait thirty seconds!”

Roxy’s mouth snapped shut. Her eyes lowered like they’d done in Jessica’s presence.

I exhaled, forcing some calm into my tone. "From now on, you touch nothing unless I tell you. Nothing. You want to help? Fine—then join Judy and keep watch. Save all that brute force for if we run into another team."

Roxy swallowed hard, flexing her grazed arm. "You're right," she muttered. "I'm sorry."

I nodded. "Thank you."

She stepped back and took the rear, her eyes darting around for danger.

I exhaled, turning back to the rest of my ruffled team. "Everyone okay?"

Though a little worse for wear, they all nodded simultaneously.

"Good." I nodded to Finn. "Let's get back to it."

We fell back into harmony, and minutes blurred as the maze shifted around us.

Corridors collapsed, new paths opened, and slowly but surely, we made our way deeper and deeper into the heart of the maze.

Then it happened.

Judy and Talia had gone ahead a few feet to test a series of symbols when the ground trembled beneath us.

With a deafening grind, the passage they were in began to narrow—two massive slabs sliding inward like jaws closing.

Fear lodged in my throat. Shit! Had I called out the wrong sequence? Was this a result of another team's actions?

Either way, we were about to be separated, and half a team was no team.

"Judy! Talia!" I shouted, sprinting forward.

The slabs were moving too fast for them to pass through without the risk of being crushed. Judy braced her shoulder against the stone, muscles straining, face twisted in effort. "It's no use! I can't—"

A scream tore through the corridor, and shock displaced my fear when I saw that it was coming from Talia.

Her entire body trembled, and in her eyes, fear and strange fury twisted together until something inside her seemed to snap free.

With a sound that was half sob, half snarl, she hurled herself against the moving slab.

My eyes widened. There was no way she could bear the weight of the moving wall.

“Talía, no—”

But in that moment, I could almost see the raw, desperate power surging through her. Her hands dug into the stone, her feet bracing on the floor—and the wall shuddered, like it was hesitating.

Just long enough.

I was frozen in shock, but Judy seized the precious extra time they’d been given and shoved Talía forward, rolling both of them into safety as the slabs slammed shut with bone-rattling finality.

Stunned silence followed. My heart thundered in my ears.

Roxy was the first to break it, awe dripping from every syllable. “Holy...shit.”

Talia lay gasping, face pale, but her body was unbroken. Her eyes were wide, disbelieving of her own strength.

I crouched beside her, touching her shoulder gently. "Talia, that was...amazing."

She shook her head, wincing as she sat up. "I—I don't know how—"

"It doesn't matter how," Judy said softly, brushing hair from Talia's damp forehead. Her own eyes glistened. "You just did it."

Talia let out an incredulous breath. "Yeah...I guess I did."

I took her hand and pulled her to her feet. She swayed slightly, and I gripped her elbow to support her.

"Well done," I said proudly.

Her cheeks tinged pink, and because I knew how heavy and uncomfortable the weight of praise could be, I changed the topic.

"Come on, guys," I said to the rest of the team. "What do you say we make it through the rest of the maze without incident?"

Judy rolled her neck, glaring at the wall that had almost crushed her. “Amen to that.”

The rest of the journey passed with renewed vigor.

The maze wasn’t only a test of knowledge. Just like the Misty Woods, it was testing our limits, our bonds, the very boundaries of what we thought we were capable of.

And somehow, against every odd stacked against us, we reached the heart of it.

The Echo Altar loomed before us—an ancient-looking dais of black stone, carved with spirals and crescents, its surface inlaid with silver that gleamed faintly like moonlight.

Symbols radiated outward from it in concentric rings, humming softly as though it eagerly awaited the right rhythm.

“Fucking finally,” Roxy muttered as the tension uncoiled from her shoulders.

Finn and I locked eyes, and he gave me a gentle, reassuring nod.

I approached the Altar, hands trembling slightly as I traced the first notes. My mind assembled the sequence we had pieced together, and as I raised my hand to strike the first beat—

The chamber doors on the far side exploded inward.

Dust clouded the air, heavy footsteps echoing through the visual haze.

When the dust cleared, my stomach sank right down to the stone floor as the newcomers came into view: Brynjar and the rest of the Shadow Claw team.

Ah, fuck.