

## **My Sister 145**

Chapter 145 ANOTHER REST DAY

SERAPHINA'S POV

The debrief felt longer than the time in the Resonant Labyrinth itself.

We were herded into one of the OTS conference rooms, still carrying dust in our hair and bruises on our bodies.

The adrenaline that had carried us through the Labyrinth had long since burned out, leaving only raw weariness behind.

An instructor droned on about “strengths displayed” and “areas for improvement,” but all I could focus on was the ache in my legs and the image of the warm bath I would draw when I got home.

Judy kept yawning into her sleeve, swaying like she was about to faceplant onto the desk.

Roxy fidgeted through the entire thing, tapping her nails against the table until the instructor snapped at her—and she nearly bit his head off.

Finn, the model student, nodded solemnly at every comment like he was filing it all away for future examinations.

Talia sat quietly, though her hands were still trembling faintly; I suspected that no matter how much time had passed, she was still reeling from the shocking show of power she'd exhibited in the Labyrinth, unable to let the adrenaline go.

When we were finally dismissed, we spilled into the night air like prisoners set free.

"Never again," Roxy groaned, throwing her head back. "Never again am I sitting through a lecture about 'team cohesion.' I'd rather drown in a swamp in the Misty Woods."

Judy snorted. "That's funny coming from you, considering you nearly turned us all into pincushions."

"Hey!" Roxy snapped, though there was no bite behind it. "I was stress-testing the traps."

"You definitely stress-tested my spleen," Finn muttered.

Despite my exhaustion, I found myself smiling.

The bickering didn't feel sharp anymore—it was the easy kind. The tension from before had melted away, replaced by banter born from surviving something together.

Relief eased my shoulders; this shift in our dynamic was welcome, almost...precious.

Unfortunately, I was two seconds away from passing out to fully appreciate it.

“Alright,” I said, clapping my hands together lightly. “That’s enough excitement for one day. Go home, sleep, let your bones remember what it feels like not to move.”

“Now that,” Roxy said, stretching like a cat out in the sun, “is an instruction I have absolutely no problem following.”

I laughed softly as Judy snorted.

But then Finn surprised me. “Wait—before we all go home—uhm...” His ears turned red as we all blinked at him. “We should make a group chat. Just to...you know. Coordinate. Share strategies. Or...memes?”

“Memes?” Roxy echoed, looking at him like he’d just grown another head.

His blush deepened, and I had the ridiculous urge to squeeze his cheeks. “I just thought it’d be...nice.”

I fully expected Roxy to shut him down. I could almost hear her readying some cutting remark about wasting time on stupid social crap.

But instead, after a beat, she shrugged. “Fine. Whatever. Just don’t add me to some never-ending notification hell. If my phone blows up at 3 a.m., I’ll kill all of you before the next challenge can.”

Finn’s grin was so startled, so openly relieved, that I felt something warm bloom in my chest.

Within minutes, numbers were exchanged, with Judy taking charge of setting everything up. My phone buzzed a few times before I even left the vicinity.

Finn: We need a team name.

Judy: Name suggestions: The Survivors? The Misfits? Trap Dodgers?

Roxy: Trap dodgers make us sound like cowards. Hard pass.

Talia: I like Misfits. It fits us.

Roxy: Makes us sound like we can’t get our act together.

Me: Which is pretty accurate lol

Finn: I was thinking something more...distinguished. Like Echo Squad. You know, to commemorate the labyrinth.

Roxy: Distinguished? What are we, a senior citizens' bowling team?

Judy: We would look super cute in matching polo shirts with embroidered logos

Roxy: Lovely. Now I have that nauseating visual burned into my brain.

Judy: You're welcome ;)

I let out a snort as I slid into my car. My smile lingered as my phone continued buzzing in the center console while I drove home.

Watching them argue about something so trivial after everything we'd been through felt strangely...healing. My teammates weren't just tolerating each other anymore—they were reaching out, connecting, the gap between us shrinking with every grumble and complaint.

Later, lying in bed with the lamp turned low, I scrolled through the stream of chatter.

Finn had already spammed about a dozen ridiculous memes and GIFS, and he'd somehow managed to edit all our faces onto an actual, honest-to-goodness senior citizens' bowling team.

Judy sent voice notes, laughing so hard she snorted in the middle. Even Talia chimed in with the occasional dry one-liner.

Roxy didn't contribute much—just a couple of curt comments and emojis—but the fact that she hadn't left the chat spoke volumes.

I set my phone aside finally, my jaw aching with the smile that just wouldn't fade.

In the span of only a few days, this strange little crew had become...something. Not just allies, but a unit. A team. My team.

The hollow ache of my missing wolf stirred faintly.

Once, the thought of leading anyone had seemed laughable. Unfathomable.

Me, the wolfless girl, the discarded daughter. Yet here I was, watching four others slowly, surely orbit closer to me, like stars pulled into a constellation.

Would having a pack of my own someday feel like this? But amplified a hundredfold?

Would that invisible bond threading between hearts, souls, and instincts give me strength I'd never dreamed of?

The thought made my chest swell. For once, the future didn't feel like a void of uncertainty waiting to swallow me. It felt like possibility. Growth.

Sleep claimed me before I could overthink it.

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Goddess bless whoever came up with the LST schedules.

The following day was another rest day, and I let myself move at my own pace.

I blocked out all the pressures—the anxiety surrounding the last challenge, the lingering weight of the clash with my mother, the subsequent dream about my father, the bout with Celeste, the awkward run-in with Kieran.

I slammed a mental door on anything not in line with a restful, peaceful day.

I spent most of the morning indoors doing mundane chores and lazing about. But as the day went on and familiar restlessness set in, I changed into a comfortable romper, slipped on sandals, and stepped out of my house.

Abandoning my car, I strolled the city streets leisurely, lingering at shop windows, smiling to myself as I imagined Maya and me laughing ourselves to tears as we tried on outrageous items.

By late evening, the sun dipped low, and the streets grew livelier.

Music spilled from open doorways, laughter and clinking glasses drifting into the cooling air.

That was how I found myself pausing outside a bar, neon lights flickering across the cobblestones.

Inside, the hum of conversation was vibrant, electric. I hardly ever visited bars—I already had an aversion to alcohol, not to mention that inebriation was not advisable during the LSTs.

But then, something inside the bar caught my eye—something playing on the large screens mounted on the walls. I smiled and let my curiosity draw me inside.

I chose a stool near the corner of the counter.

“Hi, love,” the bartender said, her pierced lip curling into a customer-friendly smile. “What will it be?”

“Uhm...just a Coke with ice, please.”

She nodded. “Not looking for a buzz tonight?”

I shook my head. “Not tonight.”

She shrugged and, a minute later, slid me a glass of Coke, the ice softly clinking against the glass.

I nodded my thanks before taking a sip, letting the chill soothe me.

And then I turned my attention to what had caught my eye. The screens flashed with highlights from yesterday’s Trials.

I watched brief replays of the other teams’ progress through the Labyrinth—saw how quickly and effortlessly the Seabreeze wolves made it to the Echo Altar, winced when the Shadow Claw wolves triggered a haze of fire within the first two minutes, and rolled my eyes as Celeste indeed trailed behind the Frostbane wolves, doing absolutely nothing.

And then, when they replayed Brynjar’s defeat at Judy’s hands, the crowd inside erupted into laughter and cheers as I snickered.

“OTS is making waves this year,” someone at a nearby table said, clinking their glass.

“No kidding,” their companion replied. “This has to be the best LST yet.”

“Love the Arenas. Did you see the Labyrinth run? How that OTS team knocked the Shadow Claw wolves down a peg?”

“Literally my favorite part of the whole thing.”

“Bet they make top rankings. I’m putting money on them.”

I lowered my gaze into my glass, a battle between pride and disbelief tightening my throat.

Strangers, faces I’d never seen before—the majority of them humans—talking about us like we mattered. Like I mattered.

It was all so surreal.

I was still reeling from the sensation when the bartender appeared again, setting down a small, decorated box before me.

“Anniversary event,” she explained with her polite smile in place. “Everyone gets a raffle ticket. Winners get called on stage at the end of the hour for a fun event.”

I shook my head. “I shouldn’t.”

“You sure, hon?” she asked. “You could get lucky.”

I almost laughed. Me, lucky? As if.

Still, what was the harm?

I slipped a hand into the box and curled my fingers around a slip of paper. I scribbled my name on it half-heartedly before dropping it back in.

Time passed, filled with more chatter, more debate about which teams had promise. Talk about my team came up again and again. Each mention sparked a glow deep inside me.

“Seraphina Blackthorne!”

I paused, my mouth pressed against my straw. I'd withdrawn into myself so much that I hadn't noticed the man on stage—a raffle box in hand, his black suit shimmering under the lights, silver threading through the dark curls of his hair.

He must have been talking for a while, but I'd completely phased out, and now—

“Seraphina Blackthorne,” he repeated with a grin, his eyes sweeping over the bar. “Where’s our lucky winner?”

My stomach lurched. No. Surely not.

The crowd clapped and whistled, and the bartender gave me a nudge, her smile a little more genuine.

I wanted to sink through the floor, but my legs carried me toward the stage, propelled by a strange mix of foreboding and curiosity.

But then—halfway up the steps—I came to a halt.

Because standing at the other end of the stage, summoned, no doubt, by fate—aka cruelty—was Kieran.