

My Sister 168

Chapter 168 ZARA

LUCIAN'S POV

My spine instinctively stiffened.

There was a roaring in my ears. A thundering in my chest. The two sensations crashed together, loud, relentless. I could barely think around the noise.

I could feel the faint vibration of the car's idle hum, see the low beam of the headlights spilling across the driveway, but my thoughts were nowhere near the present.

They'd splintered backward—years backward—to a time when the world made sense. When my heart was whole.

"H-how did you know?"

I didn't move, didn't even breathe, until Sera's voice—quiet, almost trembling—came again.

"I... suspected," she said. "The way you got when we talked about mates, and again when you told me about your 'friend' who gave you the formula for the Moon Dew Nectar. And then I heard it, plain and simple, from...mouths at OTS."

I closed my eyes. A long, steady exhale left me.

I should have known it would be inevitable. I should have told her first. I should have never hidden it from her.

I should have. I should have. I should have.

“Sera—”

“I wish I didn’t have to hear it from someone else,” she cut in, her tone sharper now. “I wish you’d just told me.”

The air between us thickened. Crickets filled the silence, their rhythmic hum syncing with the uneven beat of my pulse.

I turned toward her, finally forcing myself to meet her gaze. The faint glow of the headlights painted her profile in soft light, and gods, the hurt in her eyes gutted me.

“You’re right,” I admitted quietly. “You deserved to hear it from me. I just...” My voice trailed off as I raked a hand over my face.

"I didn't want to affect your focus before the championship. You were already under immense pressure. I didn't want to risk clouding your state of mind."

The flimsy excuse sounded even weaker aloud than in my head.

"Lucian," she said softly, "we've known each other long before the competition. What happened to all those times we had dinner, all the talks we had? When you asked me to be your girlfriend?"

Her words hit deep. Worst of all was that she wasn't accusing me—she was wounded. And she had every right to be.

"I shared parts of myself with you that I haven't shared with anyone else," she went on, the softness of her voice not hiding the sting of her words. "And you just...held back."

Guilt blazed in my chest.

I'd thought I was protecting her. But the truth was simpler, uglier: I'd been protecting myself.

From reopening a wound that had never fully healed.

"I'm sorry," I murmured. It was weak, pathetic. But it was all I could manage.

Before I could say anything more, a small voice broke through the heaviness.

“Mom?”

Sera immediately shifted, her entire demeanor softening as she went into mom-mode. “I’m here, baby.”

I rose from the steps as Daniel pushed open the car door, rubbing at his eyes, and she went to him.

“Are we home?” he yawned.

“Yes, my love,” she answered, brushing his hair back from his face.

“It’s late,” I said, moving around to open the driver’s door. “We should continue this tomorrow. Just us.”

Sera hesitated, then nodded. “Alright.”

She didn’t look at me again as she led her son up the porch steps and into the house.

I stood there long after the door closed, my reflection warped in my car's darkened glass.

And I wished tomorrow wouldn't come.

When Sera walked into the reception hall of OTS the following afternoon, every nerve in my body went on high alert.

Her expression was careful, neutral. Like she'd built a wall overnight and dared me to scale it.

I couldn't bring myself to speak; I couldn't think of any words that would be appropriate. Instead, I slowly extended my hand towards hers, and to my relief, she took it.

OTS was still buzzing with the aftermath of the LST, alive with noise—trainees moving between halls, laughter spilling from open windows, the grunting sound of sparring coming from the private rooms—but we didn't speak a word as we walked, both of us ignoring the attention we garnered.

Eventually, the hum of the campus faded behind us as we crossed into the quieter annex at the far end.

The walk wasn't long, but it might as well have been miles. Every step felt like walking on a tightrope.

And we hadn't even gotten to the hard part yet.

When we finally stopped, Sera looked up, and recognition flickered in her eyes.

The OTS Historical Exhibition Hall.

"This isn't just an explanation," I said quietly. "You deserve to understand the whole story."

And the best place to tell it was here, among ghosts and old beginnings.

Inside, the hall was quiet—sunlight slanting through the high windows, dust motes turning in the air like slow snow.

She'd been here before, when I initially gave her a tour OTS. Back in the beginning, before I knew who she really was, and what she would come to mean to me.

Her gaze skimmed the displays like they had that day, but now I watched her pay attention. Watched her gaze linger—not on the accolades or weapons or charts, but on the smaller, human details: the photographs, the faded notebooks, the first blueprints of our compound.

When we reached the far wall, I stopped.

The portrait hung half-hidden behind a gauze curtain, the edges yellowed with age.

But there she was. As beautiful as the first day I laid eyes on her.

Zara.

Fierce blue eyes. Her favored braid crown that made her look like a warrior princess. The smile that dared the world to underestimate her.

Sera didn't ask who she was. She didn't need to.

"Her name was Zara," I said softly.

Even after all these years, saying her name aloud felt like invoking a ghost. It stirred something raw in me—a maelstrom of love and pain and guilt and grief and regrets and bone-crushing longing.

"We met in the Southern Territories." The words came out steadier than I felt, and I hoped that stability would carry on until I said what I needed to.

"I was traveling for research then," I continued. "Gathering data for what would become OTS's combat framework. I'd heard rumors of a pack with unusual training methods. Thought I could just stroll into their territory and observe."

A humorless laugh escaped me. "I was...overconfident."

Sera's lips curved slightly. "Let me guess. It didn't go according to plan."

"Not remotely." I smiled despite myself. "I barely got two steps past the border before she pounced on me."

Her eyebrows lifted. "Pounced?"

"Quite literally." I could still feel the shock of that moment—her weight, her speed, her ferocity. "She thought I was a trespasser. One second, I was explaining my credentials, the next, I was flat on my back with her knee on my chest."

Sera stifled a laugh. "That's one way to make an introduction."

And what an introduction it was.

I could still summon the image when I closed my eyes.

The sun had been setting, and the orange and peach hues of the sunset haloed her face, making her look more mythical than human.

It had been a shot of lightning straight to my heart.

“She wasn’t sorry, either,” I said. “When I told her who I was, she looked me dead in the eye and said, ‘Then maybe don’t sneak into someone else’s training grounds, professor.’”

Sera’s laughter came soft and warm, and for a moment, the tension between us loosened just a little.

“Sounds like she wasn’t easily impressed.”

“She wasn’t,” I said, my smile fading into something more tender. “And that’s what drew me to her—even before the bond clicked. She was bold. Fearless. The kind of person who didn’t wait for the world to make room for her. She made her own.”

My voice wavered when I spoke again. “She extended a formal invite to her pack. Her father was Alpha, and she was the youngest of seven. Always had something to prove.”

“She must’ve related to your vision,” Sera murmured.

“She did. She was used to being overshadowed, so the idea of an organization where merit and skill took precedence over birthright was a dream come true for her. We clashed constantly—training methods, strategy, philosophy—but beneath it all, we were mirrors of each other. For every argument we had, we found twice as many things we agreed on. She believed strength wasn’t inherited—it was cultivated. That power was earned. That’s what sparked the idea for OTS.”

Sera inhaled softly. “It was her idea?”

“She used to call it a sanctuary for strays,” I said, smiling faintly. “A place where wolves without packs could rebuild themselves. Where talent wouldn’t be wasted just because of bloodline.”

Talking about our dream aloud hurt more than I expected.

“She left her pack; I’d already left mine. Together, we built the first version of Shadowveil.” My throat tightened. “We thought we had time. We thought the future stretched ahead of us, bright and glorious.”

“What happened to her?” Sera asked quietly.

“Till today, I don’t remember what it was about. But we...” I drew in a breath that didn’t quite reach my lungs. “Fuck, it wasn’t even a fight. It was just a silly disagreement, and she stormed out.”

The weight of memory descended on me. I wish I could at least remember what had made us so mad. So angry that she’d stormed out, and I’d been too miffed to go after her.

If I'd known...

Gods, if I'd known.

"She was—" The words lodged like stones in my throat, but I pushed through and pushed them out. "She was ambushed by a group of traffickers who hunted wolves for sport. I sensed her peril instantly, and Zara held her own long enough for me to reach her and fight them off. But..." I stopped, agony winding through me, turning my blood into ice.

"I reached her just in time to hold her as she died," I said quietly. "And she—she didn't even think about herself. She made me promise to finish what we started."

I closed my eyes, and I was back in that cold, dark alley. The warmth of my mate against me, the sound of her heartbeat slowing down with each shallow breath. The sticky warmth of her blood as it pooled around us.

The rasp in her voice as she weakly held out her fist. "Promise me," she'd whispered, using the last of her breath. "Promise me you'll keep our dream alive. You'll see it become something..."

And she'd stopped breathing.

The room felt smaller then. The air denser. The faint hum of the lights above was the only sound left. That, and the sound of my heart breaking all over again.

"I blamed myself," I found the strength to continue. "For months afterward, I couldn't function. I wanted to burn it all down. But"—I shook my head—"I'd made her a promise. So I built OTS from her ashes. With Maya's help. With the help of others who believed in the dream. And eventually...it wasn't about me anymore. Or even her. It became about everyone who walked through those doors."

I turned toward Sera. She looked like she was holding her breath.

"It took ten years," I said. "Ten years to build something worthy of her name. But it's no longer just mine or hers—it's ours. Every trainer, every student. Every person who refuses to be defined by where they started."

I hesitated, then added quietly, "Including you."

"You mean that?" she asked softly.

I nodded. "You've become one of the pillars of OTS, Sera," I said. "Everything you've achieved—it's what Zara would've wanted to see. She would be so proud."

Sera didn't reply, but I could see it—the flicker in her eyes. Understanding. Ache. Compassion.

But something else too.

Distance.

It was subtle, the way her shoulders drew in, the way her gaze softened but didn't quite reach me anymore. Like a door was closing, slowly, silently, and I was standing on the wrong side of it.

And there, in the hall built on ghosts and dreams, I realized something quietly terrifying: The truth had done the opposite of what I had needed it to do.

It had pushed Sera away.