

My Sister 189

Chapter 189 WHAT'S NEXT?

SERAPHINA'S POV

Maya was waiting for me on my porch steps when I got back home.

"So," she began, the casual tone belying the weight of the morning as I walked toward her, "you survived the handoff." She spread her arms. "How's your heart?"

I laughed softly, trembling between relief and lingering anxiety as I stepped into her embrace, resting my head on her shoulder. "Intact, I think. Mostly."

She stroked my back in soothing circles. "A part of it is tucked in that his little backpack, I'll bet."

I managed a smile. "You bet."

"Well," she said, forcing extra cheer into her voice as she pulled back. "I blocked off my entire day and even blew Ethan off. Retail therapy?"

I laughed, grateful for the shift. "Retail therapy, yes. Definitely yes."

I didn't even bother stepping into the house. Not ready to face the empty silence of a home without Daniel, I turned straight back to the car.

Retail therapy wasn't just my favorite activity with Maya; it was a welcome change of pace—a chance to exhale, to let the heavy weight of the morning lift.

As we browsed through racks of clothing and small home decor, Maya filled me in on the latest OTS news.

"Jessica left," she said offhandedly, flipping through a rack of sweaters. "Officially. She handed in her notice last week."

I froze, glancing at her. "Jessica? She left? But..." I scoffed. "Is she that salty about third place?"

"The opposite, actually," Maya answered. "I don't know if you know this, but she was never fully a part of Shadowveil."

"She wasn't?"

"Nope." Maya pulled out a coral sweater and held it up to my neck, her brows drawn in concentration.

“Shadowveil sentinels rescued her from an attack while she was traveling alone—she’d been near rogue territory, I think, but I don’t know all the details—and Lucian extended her amnesty so she could safely recover from her injuries. He was supposed to oversee her official induction when she got better, but I guess he’s been dragging his feet.”

She shook her head and returned the sweater to the rack. “Anyway, since she wasn’t officially Shadowveil, her LST position attracted offers from other packs. She and her teammates got plenty of interest, and she quickly took advantage of it.”

Maya lowered her voice. “My guess is she did it to save face in case Lucian rejects her.

I nodded slowly, processing.

Part of me was taken aback that Jessica had decided to step away completely from Lucian’s pack rather than trying to carve a place for herself. Another part of me worried about Roxy and how—or if—Jessica’s departure would affect her.

Maya noticed my silence and placed a hand on my shoulder. “Hey,” she said gently. “The whole point of retail therapy is to keep you out of here,”—she tapped my temple—“so stay with me, okay?”

I laughed softly, the tension in my shoulders easing slightly. “Yes, Miss Cartridge.”

We continued through the shops, examining fabrics, comparing colors, and laughing over silly accessories.

Maya teased me each time I slipped into melancholy, and every laugh came easier than the last.

After a while, we settled into a small café for coffee and a quick snack. Maya's eyes sparkled as she leaned back in her chair, sipping her latte.

"So," she began, her eyes twinkling. "What's next for the indomitable Sera?"

I snorted at the nickname. "What do you mean?"

She shrugged. "Daniel's off forging his own path. You can't just wait around for him. You have to live your own life, too." She leaned in. "How about starting a new book?"

I almost choked on my latte. "Wh-what?"

Maya smirked. "I missed you so much during the LST that I went and read a bunch of your books."

My eyes widened, and an incredulous laugh slipped out of me. "You did?"

She nodded, smirking. “For someone unlucky in love, you sure know how to write sexy male leads and sizzling chemistry.”

My cheeks burned. “Oh gods.”

She laughed, nudging me. “So, anything new in the works?”

I exhaled. My writing career, Elaine, my 300-word sequel that I’d abandoned when I joined OTS—it all seemed like a lifetime ago.

“Honestly, I haven’t thought—”

“Sera?”

I turned.

Standing a few steps from our table, elegant in a flowing ocean-blue dress, was Luna Selene of Seabreeze Pack.

“Luna Selene,” I said, startled but smiling as I quickly rose to greet her.

“Please,” she laughed softly, “I told you—it’s just Selene. Friends, remember?”

I laughed. “Right. Hi, Selene.”

Her smile brightened. “Oh, I’m so glad I ran into you. I was hoping to catch you before I leave the city.”

Maya arched an eyebrow, leaning back in her seat with a curious smile.

Selene stepped closer, warm sincerity in her eyes. “You were sensational, Sera,” she said, and my chest swelled even as my eyes welled. “I can’t think of anyone more deserving of the gold.”

“Thank you,” I whispered, my voice shaky.

Little dimples popped up on her cheeks as her smile deepened. “I wanted to remind you that my invitation still stands.”

My mouth parted, no words coming out.

I hadn’t really thought about her offer to join Seabreeze since she’d made it, but now, the thought of leaving, of joining a new pack when my son just took his first steps to become Alpha, made me hesitate.

I wasn't sure what my own heart wanted yet, and the uncertainty rooted me in place.

Selene noticed my hesitation and laughed softly.

"My invitation to visit," she clarified with a wink. "My daughter—goddess, she adores you. After watching the Trials, she's declared you her 'Luna of inspiration.'"

Selene chuckled, shaking her head with fond disbelief. "You would think her own mother wasn't a Luna."

A laugh burst out of me before I could contain it.

"I'm honored," I said honestly.

Selene handed me a sleek silver contact card. "Even if you don't choose our pack in the future, our doors are always open. Whether for rest, healing, or just sea breeze and good company."

Alina stirred softly within me, a ripple of approval. 'She's grounded. Strong. A Luna who leads with heart,' she observed, her tone tinged with something like fondness. 'I like her.'

"I'll definitely visit when I can," I promised.

“I’ll hold you to that.” Selene winked.

She nodded politely to Maya, who offered a half-smile in return, then gracefully took her leave.

As soon as she was out of range, Maya let out a dramatic sigh, crossing her arms. “Wow. Look at you. Making Luna friends. Inspiring small children. Getting personal invitations to vacation by the sea. Joining families. Must be nice being such a superstar.”

I snorted, sitting back down. “Jealous?”

“Painfully,” she deadpanned. Then her facade cracked as she poked my shoulder. “But also proud. Mostly. Maybe. Ugh, shut up.”

I grinned and leaned forward. “Hey,” I said softly, sobering up, “you’re my best friend, Maya. That’s not changing. Nobody could ever replace you.”

Her eyes softened—annoyed, emotional, fond all at once. “You’d better mean that.”

“I do.”

Maya flicked her gaze away with a small, victorious nod.

I smiled. "Besides, how can I visit her pack when I haven't even visited yours?"

The corner of her lips twitched. "Actually, my dad and brother are visiting soon."

I blinked. "Oh?"

"They've been dying to meet you. Especially my dad."

"Should I be scared?"

"Maybe," Maya smirked. "They're very...beta-warrior-meets-overprotective-family. But they'll love you." Her gaze softened. "How could they not?"

My smile deepened. "Then I can't wait to meet them."

The rest of the day flowed in warmth and laughter, lighter now with future plans threaded between coffee refills and harmless teasing.

When I dropped Maya off at Ethan's, she leaned in through the window.

“Text me if you feel the urge to cry. I’ll appear armed with beer and pretzels like”—she snapped her fingers—“that.”

I rolled my eyes and waved her off. “Go be with your mate; you’ve spent so much time on me.”

She reached in and affectionately brushed her fingers against my cheek. “I love you, babe. And remember,”—she tapped her fingers against my temple—“stay out of here.”

I laughed. “Yes, Miss Cartridge.”

I didn’t expect to find yet another person waiting for me on my porch when I returned home.

But there he was—dark blue eyes, dark coat, posture relaxed with characteristic composure.

Lucian.

He straightened as I approached. “Seraphina.”

“Lucian,” I responded softly. The setting sun ghosted over his features, softening his presence.

With Daniel taking all my full attention, plus my time off from OTS, I hadn't seen much of Lucian since the camping trip.

But our new dynamic—our friendship—held. The silence that passed between us was no longer strained. It was familiar, comfortable.

His smile was kind, even as his gaze assessed. "How are you holding up?"

My throat tightened slightly. He didn't need to clarify what he meant. "I'm...managing," I said quietly. "It's only been a few hours, but—"

"He'll be all right," Lucian interjected gently. "He's walking on the strength you built into him."

It was a remix of words I'd already heard. They still had the desired effect, and something in me eased.

I nodded. "Thank you."

I gestured toward my door. "Do you want to come in?"

I saw him contemplate the offer before he shook his head. "I can't stay long..."

He paused, studying me a moment longer, as though weighing the rest of his sentence. Then he exhaled softly. "I came to remind you of something."

I lifted a brow. "What's that?"

"The promise I made before the competition," he said. "To show you Shadowveil."

My pulse skipped.

"Our Blue Moon Festival is approaching. It's a very special event that, normally, isn't open to outsiders." A subtle pause. "But I'd like to formally extend an invitation to you."

"I thought..." I hesitated, remembering everything that had happened since he made that promise. "So much has changed. I didn't realize the invitation still stood."

We'd strayed from the clear-cut path of me being his Luna, so I was surprised he still wanted me to visit his pack.

Lucian's expression softened, a faint curve at the corner of his mouth. "Sera," he said quietly, "I keep my promises—especially the ones I made to you. Nothing can change that."

That sincerity in his words landed gently but deeply.

There was no pressure in his stance. No expectation. Just an open path, held out if I chose to walk it.

'We should go,' Alina murmured, her voice threaded with curiosity.

Daniel was off training for his future. The world was moving on. Maya's voice echoed in my mind.
'What's next?'

I released a slow breath. "All right," I said softly. "I'll go."