

My Sister 228

Chapter 228 TIME

SERAPHINA'S POV

I found my car parked in Kieran's driveway, probably retrieved from the Lockwood Estate after I abandoned it.

I had no idea how I drove home without crashing it.

My foot slammed the accelerator as I sped through the empty streets, awash with pre-dawn light.

With every mile, the bond tugged at me like a thread stretching thin, and I just kept chanting internally: Don't look back. Just get home.

By the time I pulled into my driveway, the sky had warmed to pale gold.

I killed the engine and sat there for a long moment, forehead resting against the steering wheel as the gravity of everything that had happened pressed onto me.

The library. My mother's words. The Moon Goddess. Alina. Kieran.

Mate.

It was hard to believe that all this had happened in the span of less than twenty-four hours. That I had a life before all this. That I was—

Realization struck like a bolt of lightning, sending a cold rush through me as dread settled heavily in my stomach.

I'd been gone all day and night.

Daniel.

I shoved the car door open and rushed inside, heart racing.

"Daniel?" I called out, panic lacing my voice.

Silence greeted me. The house was still.

Oh gods.

Just as the claws of panic wrapped around my throat, my phone buzzed in my pocket.

I snatched it up with trembling fingers.

Kieran: Daniel's safe. He's with my parents.

I let out a heavy breath and sagged against the nearest wall as relief poured through me like warm water.

Sera: Thank you

I stared at the blinking cursor far too long, hesitating.

As much as I loved and wanted to see my baby, I was a wreck right now, and dragging him into this chaos—especially before his ceremony—felt cruel.

So I added: Could you please ask your parents to keep him for a while longer?

The reply came almost immediately.

Kieran: Done.

And then: Take all the time you need, Sera. I'll be here when you're ready.

With my heart no longer thundering a mile a minute, the magnitude of Kieran's message sank in.

That should have made me feel better, knowing he wasn't pushing. Yet the ache in my chest lingered.

I turned off my phone without replying.

I tilted my head back against the wall and closed my eyes. Unbidden, a solitary tear slid down my cheek.

"Alina," I whispered, my voice too loud in the quiet house.

'Sera?' Her soft voice was like a balm on my aching heart.

"Kieran's our mate."

'Yeah,' she sighed. 'It appears he is. Do you want to talk about it?'

I inhaled deeply. Did I want to talk about it?

No.

But I needed an outlet for the heat burning under my skin before it devoured me whole.

The OTS Sparring Arena smelled of metal, sweat, stone, and old fury.

And this early in the morning, it was blissfully empty.

I stepped into the center, cracked my knuckles, and let all the tangled, fucked up emotions within me unspool into raw energy.

My aura flared so sharply that the light panels overhead flickered.

The heat of the bond pulsed in my veins like lava, strengthening everything—my senses, my speed, my reflexes.

Power surged outward, like a storm unleashed, violent and instinctive, as I went through all the training simulations like tearing through tissue paper.

I didn't stop, didn't ease or relent until my fist collided with a training dummy and ripped straight through it, foam and fibers exploding outward like confetti.

The shock rattled up my arm, but the frustration inside me only burned hotter, refusing to be dulled by pain.

I could feel Alina under my skin. There—full, whole, bright, beautiful.

I should've been able to Shift. That was the last step, the last destination in the journey I began all those months ago.

I dropped to all fours, breath shaking, forcing energy outward, feeling my bones tighten, skin heat, willing the transformation.

And still nothing.

"Why?!" I screamed, slamming my palm into the mat hard enough to sting. "What am I still missing?"

A maddening thought slithered in, one I didn't want to entertain.

Did I need the mark? Is that what I needed to be whole? Did accepting Kieran complete the Shift?

How ridiculous. How cruel. How perfectly on brand for fate to bind my power to the man who had broken me.

Alina's voice rose softly from within, warmth brushing against the edges of my mind.

'Do not confuse paths with prisons. The bond does not define your becoming. As the Moon Goddess said, you are fragmented. You will Shift when you believe you're whole.'

Whole.

I spent so long wishing for that, thinking it meant being able to Shift, being one with my wolf.

Apparently, I was mistaken. It turns out it was a prerequisite.

I collapsed backward, staring at the ceiling, my vision swimming as my heart beat an erratic drumbeat against my ribcage.

I stayed like that for a long time and didn't notice the faint footsteps until a shadow fell over me.

I turned as Lucian lowered himself to the ground beside me, stretching out one long leg, posture relaxed but eyes sharp.

"Well, you certainly taught those dummies a lesson," he drawled.

Despite myself, I huffed a laugh.

"You've grown much stronger," he observed. "Not just physically. It feels like...a storm found its center."

The bond jolted inside me.

I swallowed. "Something like that."

"Something's changed." His gaze lingered on me, thoughtful.

I hesitated.

Lucian was part of the small handful of people I trusted on this earth.

But some instinct—deep, primal, newly awakened—kept me silent.

It was one thing to confide in him when it was merely speculation. But bone-deep clarity was another.

The mate bond felt too new, too raw, too sacred, too vulnerable to expose to anyone. Especially someone with whom I had complicated...entanglements.

When I didn't speak, Lucian didn't push. Instead, he stretched out beside me, lying flat on the mat, hands folded behind his head.

"You know," he murmured, "when power spikes like that, it's rarely about ability. It's about emotion. Confusion. Instability. Something unresolved."

Understatement of the year. I made a dismissive sound.

"So what's unresolved?"

I exhaled. I couldn't bring myself to tell him about Kieran and the affirmed bond, or about the dream with the Moon Goddess and Alina's form, but he was still my friend, and there was still a shit ton of unresolved feelings I could share with him.

“My whole life,” I started softly, “I’ve been defined by where I belong. Who I belong to. Lockwood’s neglected daughter. Blackthorne’s unwanted wife. Daniel’s mother. OTS’ Sera. But I never stopped long enough to ask who I am outside those labels. When all of that is stripped away, when I’m standing bare, alone, who am I?”

Lucian turned his head slightly toward me.

“That’s a powerful question.”

“I just...” I folded my hands on my stomach. “After Daniel’s ceremony...I think I want to leave for a while.”

The words surprised me as they left my lips. But hearing them aloud made me realize how much I meant them. How badly I needed a change of scene.

The trip to Shadowveil had been eye-opening like nothing else before it. I wanted more of that. Space and time to find who I really was when all the labels of who I should be weren’t pressing down on me.

To figure out what “whole” meant.

Lucian’s brows lifted. “Leave?”

“Not permanently.” I stared at the ceiling as the plan formed in my mind with startling clarity.

“But I want to travel. Visit other territories. Explore cities. Packs. Lands past the borders. I want to see who I am outside of...” I waved my hand in a vague circle. “Everything.”

Lucian was silent for a long moment.

Then softly: “I’m not surprised.”

I turned to him. “You’re not?”

He shook his head. “You’ve spent your life being...for lack of a better word—caged. It makes sense you want to learn how to fly.”

Something in his tone softened me. He sounded almost...proud.

He sat up, voice shifting to Alpha-mode. “If you go, you’ll need protection, political clearance, safe passage—”

“No.” I sat up too, shaking my head. “I want to go on my own terms. I’ll ask for help if I need it. But I need to know I can stand alone.”

A shadow of something unreadable crossed his face. Admiration, perhaps. Or worry.

He reached out, fingers brushing a loose strand of hair near my cheek.

Instinctively, I leaned back—not sharply, but obviously enough to change the atmosphere between us.

Lucian’s hand froze midair.

His eyes flicked to mine, dark and assessing, and I suddenly felt like an X-ray image, all my secrets and inner thoughts bared.

“You’re hiding something,” he said quietly. Not accusing. Not hurt. Just stating a truth.

My pulse stumbled.

I held his gaze, steady despite the turmoil beneath.

“I’m figuring things out,” I said carefully. “And I need time before I share anything with anyone. Including you.”

His jaw flexed once.

Then he nodded.

“Take all the time you need.”

I looked away, exhaling slowly, hyperaware of Lucian’s words and the unanswered text on my phone.

Take all the time you need.

But that was the thing about time—it inevitably ran out.

And when it did, I would have to make a choice.