

My Sister 24

Chapter 24 THREE MINUTES

SERAPHINA'S POV

I lost focus. Again.

I knew it the second my foot slipped on a basic pivot, and the training stick flew out of my hands, landing uselessly on the other side of the room.

In the training rooms around me, I could hear the others moving, grunting, and groaning, probably doing a whole lot better than I was.

Lucian had left me to train on my own today, promising to check in on me periodically. I was grateful for that because it was one thing to mess up while on my own but a whole other thing to do it in front of an audience.

This time, I couldn't even blame my distractedness on my injury. It was evident that my heart wasn't in training.

My heart wasn't in anything.

Not since...the kiss.

I could still feel it—sudden, heated, jarring.

That wild, chaotic moment played on a loop in my head. The look in Kieran's eyes as he grabbed me, the strength of his grip, the heat of his lips.

I was still as stunned as I was that night. I should have pulled away—but I didn't. I may not have kissed him back, but I didn't stop him.

I didn't know what that meant.

I tried my best to dissect it all. Why had he done it?

Yeah, I knew he'd fought with Celeste, but that shouldn't have ended with him showing up on my front porch and turning my world over on its axis.

It all felt so...messy.

"You planning to actually train or just stand there with your head firmly shoved up the clouds?"

The sharp voice sliced clean through my thoughts like a blade.

Startled, I turned. A woman I didn't recognize stood at the door I hadn't even heard open, arms crossed over a lean, toned frame.

She had skin the color of caramel, dusty brown hair braided into cornrows, and dark brown eyes that slowly, calculatingly took me in. She watched me like a predator, trying to decide whether the prey was worth chasing.

I fought the urge to squirm under her gaze.

She arched a perfect brow and said, "If you're here to waste time, you're better off in front of a couch stuffing your face and watching sitcoms."

"I—no, I'm just—"

"Thinking of a myriad of excuses," she interrupted, cold and flat. "None of which will suffice."

She waved an arm around, and my gaze was drawn to her powerful bicep. She wasn't overly muscular, but I could see the strength rippling under her skin. "There's no place for laziness here. You might as well just leave."

My cheeks burned.

"I have been training. I just wasn't—" I started again, but she raised a hand.

My mouth slammed shut. I didn't know what it was about her, but a quiet, simmering authority seeped out of her every pore, and I instantly knew that this was a woman whose bad side I never wanted to be on.

She straightened from the wall, and my eyes tracked her as she walked across the room. Her steps were graceful, lithe—like a gazelle.

She picked up the staff that had slipped from my hands. I barely had time to move when she tossed it at me, but I managed to catch it.

"You've been training?" It didn't sound like a question she wanted answered. "Prove it then."

I raised a brow. "What?"

"Fight me."

My heart skipped a beat. "What?!"

She shrugged. "Or you can get the fuck out."

My eyes widened. Where the hell was Lucian? I needed him to check in on me right fucking now.

She crossed her arms and tapped her foot on the mat. "Well?"

"I—"

"If you want to stay, fight me. Three minutes. You last, you can stay. If not..." She shrugged. "Bye-bye. Same goes if you don't fight at all."

I blinked. "Are you serious?"

Her body looked honed, like she'd spent a lifetime training. How was I supposed to hold my own against her?

"I hate repeating myself." She gestured to the open space between us. "Clock starts when you move."

I had the urge to laugh at the incredulity of the situation. Part of me wanted to drop the staff and walk away.

But another part of me chafed against the look in her eyes, the slight derision in her tone.

I was tired of being treated like I didn't belong. By my own pack, by Kieran's pack—and now, this complete stranger.

I'd already had so much taken from me—my marriage, my son, my fucking peace of mind. I wasn't going to let OTS be taken from me, too.

So I moved.

And instantly regretted it.

She exploded forward with terrifying speed, and all I could do was throw my arms up and hope for the best.

I swung the staff at her and winced when her boot connected with my hands, knocking it clean out of my hands—right back to where she had picked it up.

Lucian would have clucked, shaken his head, and told me to go get it.

She, however, did not stop.

She didn't take a breath. Didn't go easy. Didn't hold back. Every strike she threw was calculated, clean, devastating.

She was frighteningly fast, impossibly strong, terrifyingly skilled—everything I wasn't.

I wasn't fighting a person—I was weathering a storm.

And worst of all? She wasn't even trying.

I lost count of how many times I hit the ground, nearly blacking out. Time lost all meaning, and my breaths came in desperate, ragged bursts.

Every sparring tactic Lucian had drilled into my mind evaporated, and I went into survival mode.

She never gave me a second to get on the offense. All I could do was dodge and block, letting her momentum work against her. Creating space when I could. Little tricks. Stalling. Surviving—barely.

Seconds dragged. My muscles screamed. My lungs burned. My head swam. Only sheer willpower I didn't even know I had kept me standing.

But I refused to give in. I wasn't weak or defenseless. And I would prove it if it was the last thing I—

A shrill ringing pierced through the air, and she suddenly retreated. I dropped to one knee, chest heaving, blinking the nausea and dizziness away.

She tapped her watch, silencing the timer, and folded her arms again. She wasn't panting or sweating—nothing to give away that she'd just handed my ass to me for three whole minutes.

"Not bad," she said, not even a single fucking tremor in her voice. "Imagine what you could achieve if you focused."

I looked up at her, dazed. For a split second, she was two people, and I had to blink to fix my vision. "Who the fuck are you?"

She cracked a minuscule smile and leaned down, offering a hand to help me up. "Maya Cartridge. I'll be your trainer for the next phase."

This was the 'elite trainer' Lucian had told me about?

Was he trying to have me killed?

I hesitated, then took her hand.

"You held your own longer than I expected," she noted. "But you'll need to do better when you face an opponent that decides to use their werewolf abilities."

My jaw dropped. "You didn't?"

She snorted. "I'm a Beta's daughter. If I did, you'd be in two halves across the room right now."

I stared at her in disbelief. How had she moved like that if she hadn't used her werewolf powers? "Seriously?" I asked. "You didn't use powers?"

She shook her head. "Not a single drop of it. You don't have to be a wolf to move like one. You just have to train like one."

She spread her arms, gesturing to herself. "And that's where I come in."

Her words hit deep in me, breaking through the doubt and the feeling that I didn't belong. I didn't have to be a wolf to move like one.

"You've got potential," Maya continued. "But if you want to make it, you'll have to let go of all your distractions."

She tapped her temple. "Silence that voice in your head telling you that you have to be something you're not to achieve greatness. Who you are now is enough to take you to who you need to be."

"I—"

She cocked her head. "That better not be an excuse."

I huffed a laugh, hopeful anticipation brewing inside. I understood now why Lucian had assigned Maya Cartridge to me.

I could tell that she was exactly what I needed.

I shook my head. "No excuses."

She nodded and extended a hand. I took it. Like the rest of her, her grip was firm, powerful.

"Get some rest, Sera. We start bright and early tomorrow."

I nodded. "Thank you, Maya."

She gave me a slow, devious smile. "You won't be saying that when I have you on your knees, puking up your intestines."

My mouth dropped open, and she threw her head back, laughing.

"See you, Sera," she threw over her shoulder as she walked out of the room.

Her voice held promise—of torture and agony. But I knew that if I could brave through that, I would come out stronger than ever.

I couldn't wait.

Later, as I slipped into my car, eagerly anticipating going home and soaking in a hot lavender bath, my phone buzzed.

I reached for it and frowned at the name on the screen: Michelle Brenner—Daniel's homeroom teacher.

Did this have to do with Daniel's absence from school? Kieran assured me he'd sorted it all out.

"Hello?"

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Blackthorne."

I winced. I really needed to go about changing my name—or at least letting the people around me know I was divorced.

"I called to remind you about the parent-teacher conference this evening."

I bit back a groan. I'd forgotten about Daniel's biannual PTC.

"I trust you and Mr. Blackthorne will be attending together as usual?"

My stomach turned.

The kiss had momentarily left my headspace while I was trying not to die sparring with Maya. But now, it returned with a vengeance—sharp and achingly vivid.

I cleared my throat. "Yes," I said, forcing the word out. "We'll be there."

If I didn't shoot myself in the head before then.

