

My Sister 249

Chapter 249 MOONLIGHT ALLEY

SERAPHINA'S POV

The bookmark gleamed faintly when I stepped out of the director's garden, its silver lines catching the late-afternoon sun.

I held it up, turning it until the light revealed the pattern more clearly.

And then I realized it wasn't a pattern.

On the back, in tiny, delicate script, was a single line: Independently obtain the Moonlight Alley talisman.

No instructions. No explanation. No hint of what the talisman even looked like.

Alois had handed me a puzzle with no edges and expected me to assemble the picture before sunrise.

I exhaled through my nose. "Great. Fantastic. Nothing like a little vague mysticism to get the blood pumping."

Alina hummed. 'Don't despair. You've always loved riddles.'

"Yeah," I murmured. "Except when they're about my life."

'Hey, your father walked this path. So can you.'

Those words steeled something in me.

She was right; my father must have gone through this same process.

And whatever truth he had been chasing, whatever truth had been kept from me my entire life—I was finally closing in on it.

I couldn't let anything stand in my way.

I flipped the bookmark over again and studied it. That's when I noticed an extra detail: a small, hand-carved map along the bottom—a crude sketch marking an area on the outskirts of the institute, shaded in gray.

Faint lettering read: Moonlight Alley.

A tingle ran down my spine. Alois didn't tell me outright where to go, but he hadn't hidden the path either.

So I followed it.

Moonlight Alley was nothing like the bright, open academic paradise I had come from.

Here, the air felt heavier. Denser. Shadowed.

The buildings were older, weather-beaten, clustered tightly together. Narrow corridors formed a twisting maze, the stone walls patched and cracked. Dim lanterns swung overhead, creaking in the cold breeze.

People lingered near doorways and narrow shops—wolves with threadbare clothing, Omega families sharing small scraps of food, mixed-bloods who kept to the shadows as if daylight wasn't theirs to claim.

And every pair of eyes followed me.

Some curious. Most wary. A few hostile.

I might as well have walked in wearing a neon sign blinking 'OUTSIDER!'

I maintained an open, neutral posture. Not dominant. Not submissive. Simply present.

Still, their gazes tracked me like a foreign specimen, intense enough to make my skin crawl.

The sooner I found what I was looking for, the sooner I could leave before one of those hostile gazes turned into a hostile fist.

But I didn't have a lead. I didn't even know what this talisman looked like.

So I did the only thing I could: I observed.

I drifted past small stalls selling cheap trinkets and worn amulets. Past a group of Omegas huddled together, whispering. Past a narrow shop with faded charms hanging from the doorframe—none special, none memorable.

Nothing screamed Moonlight Alley talisman. Not even a whisper.

I was starting to feel stupid, wandering like a lost puppy while the sun edged lower in the sky, when a small body slammed into me.

“Oof—!”

A child stumbled back, wide-eyed.

“Sorry!” he squeaked.

He looked a little younger than Daniel—nine, maybe eight. Big eyes, tattered clothes, a cap pulled low over messy auburn hair. He flashed me a bright, guilty smile and darted away.

A soft groan slipped out of me.

I was getting nowhere. I reached into my coat pocket, intending to call Maxwell in case he had any ideas of what treasure I was searching—

And froze.

He didn't.

My hands frantically moved through my pocket, then the other one, just in case I'd misplaced it.

He did.

“That little—”

Alina cackled. ‘He stole from you!’

I hissed through my teeth, turned on my heels, and sprinted after him.

The boy was fast, much faster than most human children. He darted between market stalls, slipped under a low-hanging sign, and shot down a narrow passage that looked barely wide enough for a cat.

It would have been hard for a normal target to give chase.

But I wasn’t normal.

Thanks to Maya’s training, I could follow a squirrel up a tree if needed.

As I ran, my phone smacked against my coat pocket. I wouldn’t have cared if the little shit had taken my phone or wallet; they could be replaced.

But he'd taken the one thing I absolutely could not lose: the compass Daniel had given me. 'So you always find your way back.'

No way in hell was I letting that go.

"Hey!" I shouted. "Stop!"

He didn't. Instead, he giggled—actually fucking giggled—and veered sharply into a side alley.

I followed—and ran straight into a trap.

A low rope snapped upward, catching my ankle—but instinct kicked in before I fully realized what was happening.

I twisted in midair, flipping and dropping to one knee. Another rope whipped toward my waist—I ducked. Something metal clanged overhead, a rusted bucket ready to fall on my head—I sidestepped.

I clenched my teeth and dodged a swinging wooden plank, then ducked under a net that tried to drop on top of me.

The boy watched the whole thing from the end of the alley, mouth hanging open in disbelief.

“Tch,” he muttered. “Of all days to pick a damn martial artist.”

“You picked the wrong tourist, kid,” I panted, pushing off the wall and sprinting again.

His eyes widened, and he bolted.

But he wasn’t expecting me to vault over a crate, bounce off the alley wall, and land behind him.

Maya would have combusted with pride.

I grabbed the back of his shirt. “Got you!”

He thrashed wildly. “Let go! Let go! Let go!”

“No,” I huffed. “Give me back my stuff.”

“I didn’t take anything important!” he shouted, kicking at my shin. “It’s just a trinket! You chased me two streets for that?! You rich people are crazy!”

His cap fell off in the struggle.

Revealing...a girl.

Small and wiry, with sharp, fox-like features and fierce emerald eyes.

She froze for a second—just long enough to look offended that she'd been discovered.

Then she bared her teeth and bit me.

“OW—HEY—!”

She dropped the compass into my hand, wrenched free from my grip with surprising force, and bolted.

I could've left it at that.

I had my prize. The chase was over.

But something in the look she'd given me—defiant, scared, resigned—stuck like a thorn beneath my ribs.

Before I could talk myself out of it, my feet were already heading down the path she took.

I found her huddled behind a broad cedar tree at the edge of the alley, shoulders shaking.

She didn't hear me approach until a twig cracked under my boot.

Her head whipped up, eyes blazing. "Go away!"

"I'm not here to yell at you," I said softly.

She scrubbed her face with her sleeve. "You already got your damn toy back. Now leave me alone."

"It's not a toy," I murmured, crouching down a respectful distance away. "It's a compass. My son, Daniel, made it for me. So I'd always find my way back home."

Her expression flickered, her mouth twisting into a sneer.

“Good for you,” she muttered. “And good for stupid Daniel, whose mommy loves him so much she’ll chase a kid three blocks for a piece of junk.”

Something in my chest cracked at her words.

I stayed quiet until she no longer looked like she might bolt again.

Finally, I asked, “What’s your name?”

“What do you care?”

“I don’t want to have to keep referring to you as ‘kid’.”

A long pause.

Then, grudgingly: “Ava.”

“Ava,” I repeated gently. “I’m Sera.”

“Cool.” She hugged her knees. “Bye, Sera.”

I ignored the dismissal. “Why were you stealing?”

“Oh, you know, I just love the thrill and the chase.” She shot me a glare, her broken voice softening the bite of her sarcasm.

I waited.

Her jaw trembled. “My grandma’s sick. Medicine costs money. Spoiler alert—we don’t have any.”

Ava sniffed and glared at the dirt. “Grandma raised me after my parents died. She always said we didn’t need anyone else. But she’s getting worse, and I—”

Her voice broke entirely.

I reached out slowly—not touching her, just offering my hand in the space between us like a bridge.

“Ava...you don’t have to handle this alone.”

She blinked rapidly, fighting tears. “There’s no one else jumping in to help, so...” Her tiny shoulders lifted and dropped.

"I know how that feels," I whispered. "More than you think."

She looked up, studying me with guarded suspicion. "No, you don't. You're rich."

I snorted. "Not the point."

"Pretty."

"Still not the point."

"Grown-up."

"Also not the point."

She rolled her eyes. "Then what is?"

I offered a small smile. "That right now, you're not alone."

The sun was already slipping below the horizon. The clock was ticking on my twisted scavenger hunt. But that would have to wait.

I had to attend to this side quest.