

My Sister 251

Chapter 251 ELIAS

SERAPHINA'S POV

In addition to the cryptic warning about the gatekeeper who might very well turn me away, the only other thing Alois had told me about the Origins Archives Room was where to find it.

Not inside any building.

Not beneath the Hall of Memories like I'd suspected.

"Behind the institute," he'd said, tapping a map with his knuckle. "On the rear mountain. Look for the ancient tree. You'll know it when you see it."

So I knew exactly where I was going.

But knowing where and knowing what waited there were two entirely different things.

The path behind the research institute sloped upward into the mountain, narrowing the farther I walked.

What began as a neat gravel trail soon dissolved into uneven stone and tangled roots, the trees growing older, thicker, twisted with age. The air itself felt heavier here, quiet but not empty. Expectant. Like a held breath.

It wasn't until I reached a small ridge that I finally saw it.

A tree—if it could still be called that.

Its trunk was gargantuan, easily wide enough for ten men to wrap their arms around. Its bark was silvery-black, ridged like ancient armor, and its roots sank deep into the mountain stone.

Its canopy stretched so far and high that it eclipsed the sky. The leaves shimmered faintly in the morning light, as if brushed with stardust.

A hollow yawned at its base.

Dark. Round. Deep enough that the sunlight did not reach inside.

My breath caught.

This was no doorway carved by hand. No architectural marvel or engineered seal.

This was nature, shaped by old world magic, opening its ribs to reveal a hidden heart.

And beside it stood a small wooden cabin.

Smoke curled from the chimney. A chopping block sat near the door, an axe embedded in the wood. Beneath the eaves hung strings of dried herbs, talismans, and wind-chimes made of bone and stone.

And sitting on the porch was a man.

Elias.

He looked younger than I expected—maybe late thirties or early forties—but there was something old behind his eyes.

His hair was dark, cut short, streaked with soot or ash, and his features were sharp but worn. Scarred hands rested on his knees as he watched me approach. There was no warmth or curiosity in his gaze, only an unyielding wall of indifference.

When I reached the bottom step, he didn't bother standing.

"What do you want?" he asked flatly, his voice like gravel.

I swallowed, straightening. "My name is Seraphina. I'm here with Director Alois's permission. I seek entry to the Origins Archives Room."

He snorted.

"Permission?" He waved a hand like he was swatting away a mosquito. "I don't care if the Moon Goddess herself granted you permission. Turn around. Go back."

"I'm not here for vanity or curiosity," I insisted. "I'm seeking answers—"

He stood abruptly, and I instantly noticed the uneven shift of his weight. His left leg was a polished metal prosthetic, attached just above the knee, the leather straps worn but meticulously maintained.

He jabbed a finger at me. "Every arrogant young master and lady who comes up here says the same thing. 'I'm different.' 'My purpose is noble.' 'My question is important.' I've heard it all."

He turned away, muttering, "The Origin Archives are not a playground for entitled purebreds who think the world owes them revelations."

Heat prickled at my cheeks. "I'm not—"

But he was already limping back toward his cabin door.

“This place is not for the likes of you,” he snapped without looking back. “Go home.”

The door slammed shut before I could speak again.

I stood there, stunned, exasperated, and angry in equal measure.

A scream clawed its way up my throat. Every obstacle, every dead end, every smug dismissal I’d faced since arriving had built up like pressure behind my ribs. Now, with the Origin Archives finally within reach, of course, there was yet another barrier in my way.

Alina’s presence wrapped around me, warm and steady, easing the spike of ire.

‘Do not let frustration overwhelm you,’ she whispered. ‘He is only doing what he believes he must.’

I pursed my lips together. Breathed through my nose.

“So what do I do?” I murmured.

‘What you must.’

A wry smile pulled on my lips. “Look at you, jumping on the cryptic train.”

Her amusement soothed me a little more.

I looked around. I had no idea what I sought, but when I knew it when I saw it.

Near the cabin, half-hidden by tall grasses, was a small grave marked by a simple stone. The carving was weathered with age, but the name was still visible. Theresa.

Something inside me softened instantly.

Loss lived here.

Old, quiet, heavy.

And Elias carried it like armor.

I wondered if that was why he guarded the Archives so fiercely.

Something deep in my bones pulled me towards the grave. It had nothing to do with me or my quest. If anything, Elias might find it disrespectful and add my bones to his collection of wind chimes.

Knowing all that, I still moved, each step slow and reverent. Next thing I knew, I was sinking one knee into the earth before the stone.

I placed a hand over my heart. Bowed my head.

Right next to my knee, a small wildflower grew—pale purple, delicate. I plucked it gently and laid it at the grave's base.

Then whispered the Lockwood ritual blessing: "May your spirit walk unburdened. May your name be held by the earth and remembered by the sky."

The wind shifted.

Soft. Warm. Almost...grateful.

A pang tightened my chest. I'd whispered that prayer last at my father's funeral. And this very moment, this place, thousands of miles away from home, was the first time in a long, long time that I'd felt so close to him.

The ache was so visceral that tears gathered in my eyes.

I blinked them away furiously as I rose—

And felt eyes on me.

Elias stood in the cabin doorway again, his expression no longer stone—but something close to startled recognition.

“You,” he murmured. “That blessing. Where did you learn that?”

I swallowed. “My family. The Lockwoods.”

A shadow crossed his face, recognition rippling through his eyes like a stone dropped into still water.

“Of course,” he whispered. “You’re Edward Lockwood’s daughter.”

It wasn’t a question.

I nodded slowly. "Yes."

Elias exhaled sharply and braced a hand against the doorframe, as if memory had knocked the air out of him.

"Theresa—my sister," he said hoarsely, "was friends with your father."

My breath stilled.

"She was a mixed-blood," he continued, eyes drifting toward the grave. "But brilliant. On the path to becoming the next director of the New Moon Institute." His throat flexed. "Before she was killed protecting this same institute during a raid by rogues."

I felt his grief like a physical weight. Heavy. Humbling.

He looked back at me, gaze softening in a way that almost broke my composure.

"Edward was the only high-ranking wolf who came up here to honor her. Every year."

I clenched my hands. "I didn't know."

“Of course you didn’t,” he said with a bitter half-smile. “He kept his past buried to give you a quiet life. An ordinary life.”

My heart lurched. “What do you mean?”

He shook his head. “Even now, I won’t be the one to reveal what your father tried so desperately to shield you from.”

A sharp, helpless frustration punched through me.

“Elias, please. I’m here because I need answers. I’m here because something is happening to me—something I don’t understand. My father came to this place seeking the same truth. I deserve to know what that is. It’s my life.”

He studied me for a long moment. And in his sharp, piercing gaze, I saw what he saw.

Not status, or inadequacy or even his bias.

Elias saw something else.

Fate. Burden.

Maybe...echoes of an Alpha he once knew.

Finally, he spoke. "Not just anyone is accepted into the Archives."

I lifted my chin. "I understand."

"No," he said firmly, limping toward me until he stood only a few feet away. "You don't."

His moss-green eyes bored into mine. "It isn't simply a place to ask questions and receive answers. It tasks you. Pierces into your very soul to burn away what it doesn't deem worthy. Not many survive."

I gritted my teeth, refusing to let dread take hold. "I am my father's daughter. If he survived, so will I."

His lips quirked, something like amusement dancing in his eyes.

"If the Archives accept you, you will be granted three chances. Three visits. Three questions. For your entire life."

My breath hitched.

“Only one question per visit,” he added. “No more.”

That felt impossibly small. My head spun with the sheer mass of everything I wanted to know.

“What should I ask first?” I whispered.

“That,” Elias said quietly, “is the first trial. Choose wisely.”

His gaze softened—barely. “And pray your question is one the Archives will answer.”

My pulse thumped, slow and thunderous.

He looked toward the ancient tree, its hollow dark and waiting.

The wind stirred, lifting my hair. The hollow of the ancient tree seemed to exhale, as if waking. Watching. Waiting.

And I realized: The next step wasn’t just a door.

It was judgment.

A test of who I was—and who my father had feared I might become.

I inhaled, steadying myself.

“I’m ready,” I said.

Elias stepped aside.

“Then enter,” he said softly. “But remember, Seraphina Lockwood, some answers do not come without a price.”