

My Sister 258

Chapter 258 STILL BECOMING

SERAPHINA'S POV

Freshly showered and changed, I sat on the edge of the narrow bed in Elias's cabin, my bag open at my feet, the envelope resting on my knee.

The seal bore the faint shimmer of layered encryption runes—subtle, elegant, and unmistakably Alois's work.

I broke it.

Inside, a dense stack of papers waited, but one sheet stood apart. It unfurled with a gentle whisper, ink blossoming into focus beneath my fingertips.

'Seraphina,

I kindly request that you accompany a small escort unit transporting a batch of special medical equipment to a coastal transfer station.'

My brow furrowed as I kept reading.

The next paragraph piqued my interest.

The “equipment” was a newly developed medication—miraculously effective against a rapidly mutating lycanthropic infectious disease that had already taken hold in several border regions.

Highly unstable. Highly coveted. And, if it fell into the wrong hands, catastrophic.

Hence, the disguise and escort.

And then I reached the final section.

'As compensation for your time and discretion, you are granted encrypted offline access to ninety percent of the Institute's core research library—except, of course, the Origin Archives.

More details of your trip are attached.

Till we meet again,

A.'

I stared at the words, my mind briefly going blank. Ninety percent of the core library.

Not abstracts. Not summaries. The actual data. All the research I'd hoped to comb through. Maybe more than I would've ever been trusted with under normal circumstances.

A shaky, half-hysterical laugh escaped me.

"That's...insane," I muttered.

Elias, who had been leaning against the doorframe, watching me patiently, huffed. "That's Alois."

I looked up sharply. "Do you have any idea what he's just asked me to do?"

"Yes," he said simply.

I dropped the letter into my lap. "Why? He barely knows me. How can he trust me with such a responsibility?"

Elias's gaze softened a fraction. "It would seem to me,"—he shrugged—"that he knows enough."

I glanced down at the rest of the documents.

One was a map of the coastal highway route the escort team would take, marked clearly where it would overlap with the path to my next destination.

Suspicion prickled faintly. "He knows I'm heading to Seabreeze Pack."

"He knows everything," Elias said with another shrug. "He's the most brilliant seer the lycans have produced in centuries. He probably foresaw you arriving before you were even born."

I opened my mouth—and then closed it, because that somehow didn't feel like exaggeration.

I remembered Alois' words when he'd first seen me in his office, even though I had no appointment. 'So the visitor I was expecting has finally arrived.'

Still, questions burned on my tongue. I wanted—needed—to ask why the director had helped me so much, why he seemed to know exactly what I sought, whether he understood more about the hollow in my soul than he let on.

But if he wanted to answer, he would have come to me directly. Sending a message through Elias instead was as clear a dismissal as any.

My time at the institute was coming to an end.

As if he possessed the same gift as Alois and could read my thoughts, Elias cleared his throat. “I suppose this is goodbye.”

I looked up at him. “And if I wanted to stay longer? If I wanted to ask Alois more questions?”

His wry smile was only slightly apologetic. “You already know the answer to that.”

I chewed on my bottom lip. “And if I ignore the errand? If I instead scour this institute looking for him?”

Elias snorted. “Then you’ll wake up in thirty years, and realize you’ve spent half your life going round in circles. Alois will not be found unless he intends it. When he wishes to disappear, he does so thoroughly. Even I don’t know where he goes.”

I inhaled slowly. “That’s what I thought.”

I exhaled, looking back at the letter. “I suppose this is his way of telling me I have enough to keep moving.”

Elias studied me for a long moment, then inclined his head. “You’ve gained more in a few days than most gain in a lifetime. Don’t cheapen that by clinging.”

I huffed. "You sound like him."

"I learned from the best," he said dryly.

Once my bag was zipped and slung over my shoulder, the cabin felt...smaller. Not in a suffocating way. In the way a place does when you've outgrown it.

Before stepping outside, I paused.

"I need to make a phone call."

Elias nodded once. "I'll give you privacy."

I stepped onto the porch alone, the mountain air cool against my skin, and tapped Daniel's name on my phone.

He answered on the first ring.

"Mom!"

Relief crashed through me, nearly buckling my knees. I dropped onto the porch step, a smile breaking through the sting in my eyes. "Hey, baby."

"You're okay?" His voice pitched high. "I couldn't reach you, and I was so worried!"

"I'm okay," I promised. "I'm safe. Sorry I was MIA; I would have called beforehand if I'd known."

He exhaled hard enough that I could swear I felt his breath through the phone. "Is Dad with you?" he asked.

I frowned. "What do you mean? Why would he be with me?"

"I had a bad dream. And he had a bad feeling. He left to come find you; he promised he'd bring you home."

The words struck straight through my ribs. I had no words to explain the pressure that settled around me.

Kieran had promised to stay with Daniel, and to hear that he had left our son alone should have angered me.

It...didn't.

What it did instead was far worse.

Something in my chest pulled tight—gratitude twisted uncomfortably with dread.

Had the bond screamed at him? Had he felt my pain in the Starlight Hallway?

I closed my eyes, breathing carefully through my nose so Daniel wouldn't hear the way my voice threatened to shake.

"Hey," I said gently. "Grandma and Grandpa were with you, right?"

"Yes," Daniel answered. "They haven't left me alone for a second since Dad left. It's annoying, honestly."

I exhaled a small laugh.

Good. At least that.

Still, an ache unfurled low in my chest. Kieran coming for me wasn't a simple thing. It wasn't just love or worry—it was instinct, the bond tugging at him, his Alpha need to protect, to anchor, to fix.

The very things I was trying to step out from under.

"Mom." Daniel's voice was suddenly soft, pulling me out of my reverie. "You have to stay safe. I...I don't ever want to feel that way again."

"Oh, baby." I sighed. "I will, I promise. It might take a little longer than I planned, but no matter what—I'm coming home to you."

He sniffed. "Okay. Just...be careful, Mom."

"I will." I smiled, letting warmth seep into my voice. "You be good for Grandma and Grandpa, alright?"

"I always am," he said, then added, "I love you."

"I love you, too baby. More than anything."

When the call ended, I sat there for a moment longer, phone pressed to my chest, breathing through the ache.

I glanced instinctively toward the tree line beyond Elias's cabin, toward the path that led back to the institute's rear mountain. Toward the barrier I knew stood there, invisible but absolute.

Part of me longed to walk toward it. To let Kieran find me. To let the fierce certainty of the bond enfold me and soothe the ache that had been growing since I left.

The temptation was strong. Seductive. Familiar.

And dangerous.

If I turned back now, if I let him catch me at this fragile, newly forged point, I would fold.

Not out of weakness, but because, even after everything, loving Kieran had always been my most natural instinct.

I remembered his voice in my bedroom. Low. Raw. Honest in a way that had gutted me.

'I could make you stay... But if I did, I'd lose you forever.'

He'd let me go.

I did not know why he was chasing me again. Maybe not to cage me. Not to command me.

Maybe...to save me.

And I couldn't let him. I didn't need saving.

Behind me, the wind chimes stirred.

Theresa's grave rested just beyond the edge of the trees, the plain stone half-lit by the slanting sun. The chimes nearby swayed, their low, clear notes weaving through the air like a blessing.

I pictured my father there, head bowed, hands folded, murmuring the Lockwood ritual.

"I'm still walking," I murmured. "Still searching. Just like you did."

The chimes rang again, a little stronger this time, as if answering.

My goodbye with Elias was as brisk and emotionless as our hello.

And then I was on my way.

As I reached the path down the mountain, the windchimes' song trailed after me for several steps before fading into the forest.

Ahead waited the escort team. The road. The coast. Seabreeze.

And somewhere beyond all that, the rest of myself—still unfolding, still becoming.