

## **My Sister 267**

Chapter 267 AWAKE

SERAPHINA'S POV

I couldn't sleep.

I lay on the wide bed in the room Selene had readied for me, sheer curtains fluttering with the sea breeze, moonlight painting silver ribbons on the floor while my thoughts tumbled restlessly.

Every time I closed my eyes, I felt it again.

Depth.

Not the sharp, overwhelming surge from the ambush. Not the crushing compression of Corin's interrogation.

This was quieter. Broader. Like standing ankle-deep at the edge of the ocean and suddenly realizing the water stretched on forever.

The Ethereal Sea...

‘You’re trembling,’ Alina noted.

I snorted softly into the pillow. ‘Can you blame me?’

She didn’t answer right away. I felt her presence instead—warm, watchful, coiled close to my core the way she’d been since I woke up after the Starlight Hallway.

‘You’re excited,’ she said finally. ‘And relieved. And—’

‘Terrified?’

‘A little,’ she admitted. ‘But what I was going to say is...awake.’

I rolled onto my back, staring up at the ceiling beams. ‘What do you think about what Corin said. About my...rank.’ I exhaled. ‘Advanced intermediate at minimum.’

Alina hummed. The sound rippled through me, a resonance aligning with my own. ‘He was being conservative.’

I sucked in a sharp breath. ‘What does that mean?’

'It means,' she said carefully, 'that what you showed was instinctive. Untrained. Unanchored. And still you bent fields, projected mass suggestion, and brushed layered minds without collapse.'

My pulse quickened. 'That should still fit advanced intermediate.'

'No,' Alina replied. 'It exceeds it.'

I sat up, shoving the blankets aside. The room smelled of citrus and salt, and the scents grounded me enough to think.

'But even Corin couldn't see clearly.'

'Corin sees structure,' Alina said. 'Ranks. Precedent. He doesn't see what hasn't finished forming.'

I swallowed. 'So what are you saying?'

'I'm saying,' Alina said gently, 'that you are not done waking up.'

The magnitude of her words sent a thrill skating down my spine.

'I'm satisfied,' I said honestly. 'Advanced intermediate is...more than enough.'

Amusement rippled through me. 'Too many people did it for too long, and now you too underestimate yourself.'

"Apparently," I murmured aloud.

I swung my legs off the bed and padded across the room, the stone floor cool beneath my bare feet.

I retrieved my laptop and the nondescript thumb drive that had been inside Alois' envelope.

I turned the tiny device over in my fingers, marveling that it contained nearly the entire heart of the Institute's core research library.

'Sometimes, the most unassuming vessels hold the most power,' Alina murmured.

I chuckled as I inserted the drive into my laptop. "You've gotten so philosophical lately."

I could have sworn she shrugged within me.

The interface bloomed into view—clean, minimalist, deceptively simple. Categories unfolded as I scrolled, becoming more detailed as I clicked on topics and subtopics.

Psychic Theory. Combat Applications. Field Ethics. Suppression Protocols. Anchoring Case Studies.

The next few hours slipped away unnoticed.

I devoured the materials with a hunger that surprised me. Diagrams of layered resonance fields. Annotated examples of battlefield manipulation that suddenly made my instincts during the ambush make sense.

Defensive psychic lattices that could redirect hostile influence without brute force. Group cohesion techniques that explained how I'd boosted Iris' awareness without meaning to.

Then it got a little...disturbing.

I read about psychic overreach—cases where unanchored psychics collapsed under feedback loops, their minds splintering when they tried to project too broadly without an anchoring force.

My fingers stilled.

Anchoring force.

Corin had touched briefly on that while he explained to me, but he hadn't delved deep.

He mentioned that his anchoring force was the ocean, but I didn't need to worry about finding mine just yet because he was part of the rare few who knew upon awakening.

'Most don't manifest one until Dominator level.'

I pulled up the case studies.

A Dominator anchored to volcanic pressure. Another to starfall radiation. One rare example—fragmentary, heavily redacted—anchored to lunar resonance.

My breath caught.

'You smell like moonlight!'

'The moon-touched girl returns.'

What had Codex said he saw around me? Moonlight-spectrum interference?

'That doesn't mean...' I hesitated.

'It doesn't mean anything yet,' Alina agreed. 'Anchors choose their timing. Yours could be anything.'

I leaned back in the chair, staring out at the dark sea beyond the window. The waves reflected the moon in broken, shifting paths—never still, never the same.

Before I could sink deeper into speculation, my phone chimed.

Incoming call.

Daniel.

"Shit," I breathed, glancing at the time. "I can't believe I forgot."

I accepted the call instantly.

"Mom!" Daniel's face filled the screen, hair damp as if he'd just showered. "You promised to call once you get to Seabreeze."

"I know, I know, baby," I said, giving him an apologetic smile. "I got...sidetracked."

"So? How did the trip go?"

I thought of the rogue attacks and my near abduction.

"Mom." Daniel leaned closer to the screen, eyes narrowed. "Are you okay?"

"I am," I assured him, smiling despite myself. "The trip went smoothly. Better than expected, actually."

He relaxed visibly. "Yeah, you're glowing."

My smile widened. "I am?"

He nodded, his face brightening. "Something good happened, right?"

I hesitated, choosing my words carefully. "Yeah...I'm learning a lot about myself. Growing a lot too."



His grin widened. "Like power-wise?"

"Like me-wise," I corrected gently. "But yes. Power too."

He pumped his fist. "That's awesome, Mom!"

I laughed softly. "Thank you, baby. Anything new going on with you?"

His expression shifted then. "Oh! Grandma Margaret sent my Christmas present early."

I blinked. "She did?"

"Yeah," he said. "And she asked when you're coming home. She said she might be traveling soon and hoped to see you before then."

My chest tightened. "Traveling... Did she say where?"

He shook his head. "Nope."

I didn't matter. I already had an inkling.

"I'll...call her," I said after a moment.

Daniel smiled, satisfied. "Okay. Don't forget."

"I won't," I promised.

We talked for a bit longer, and Daniel showed me the bespoke suit my mother had given him.

After the call ended, the room seemed to thicken with silence, weighted and still.

I stared at the screen for several seconds before pulling up my contacts and hovering over my mother's.

I hadn't spoken to her properly since the Frostbane library.

Looking back, her words hadn't just wounded me; they'd rooted themselves deep, becoming the spark that ignited everything: the vision of the Moon Goddess and Alina, and this journey I might never have taken otherwise.

I exhaled and pressed call.

She answered on the third ring.

“Sera?” Surprise flickered across her face, quickly masked by composure. “I was just thinking about you.”

I held back a disbelieving snort.

“I heard you sent Daniel his gift early,” I said.

“Yes,” she replied. “I wasn’t sure I’d see him before the holidays.”

Something in her tone shifted. Calculating. Hesitating.

“And you?” she asked. “Are you well?”

I studied her face—the familiar elegance, the careful distance—and realized she already knew something was different.

“I am,” I said. “Better than I’ve ever been.”

Her eyes sharpened. "I can hear it in your voice. See it in your face."

I didn't bother easing into it.

"Yes, I've heard the glow is a by-product of the Origin Archives Room."

My mother's expression froze—not blank, but startled, as if I'd spoken a password she hadn't expected anyone else to know.

"You've been there," she said slowly.

"I don't know why you sound surprised," I said, keeping my voice as steady as I could. "After all, Father went there too."

Her breath caught.

"That...that shouldn't have been possible."

"And yet," I said evenly, "it was."

She closed her eyes briefly. When she opened them, something guarded had slid into place.

“Sera,” she said carefully, “there are things that cannot be explained over a call.”

“I gave you the chance to explain face-to-face,” I bit out. “Remember?”

Her pause was answer enough.

“I’ll ask this new question, Mother. I expect a lie, but I’ll give you the benefit of the doubt.”

My mother’s gulp was audible down the line.

“What did you and Father discover about me—and then hide?”

Her eyes widened. “Sera—”

“Why,” I demanded, “did my powers require suppression?”

She inhaled sharply. "You must not tell anyone what you can do. No one can find out, Sera, especially not rogues."

This time, I did snort. It was a little too late for that.

"Why?" I pressed.

"Because it makes you a target."

"I already am," I shot back.

Her face faltered, just a fraction, before she composed again. "We did what we thought was best."

"For who?"

She started to speak, then stopped. "When I return," she said instead, "I will explain everything."

"When you return," I echoed, "from visiting Celeste."

Her lips thinned.

I nodded. "Of course, that's where you're going. Every year, like clockwork."

"Sera—"

"I have to go," I said, ending the call before my voice could betray me.

In the grand scheme of things, envy over my mother's relationship with Celeste was laughably mediocre.

The laptop screen had faded to black, and I lingered, gazing at my own reflection in the darkness.

I shouldn't have been surprised. After all, for the last ten years, my mother had gone to spend Christmas wherever Celeste was, and she'd told me she would leave after Daniel's heir ceremony anyway.

I myself had encouraged her to travel to Celeste if she missed her so much.

Still.

I stood and drifted back to the window.

The sea stretched endlessly before me, vast and unknowable.

Was I now supposed to wait for my mother to finish catering to my sister before I got my answers?

'Waiting,' Alina said softly, 'has never protected you.'

"No," I agreed. "It hasn't."

I straightened, a new resolve crystallizing within me.

If my mother wouldn't give me answers, I would take them myself.

Every secret. Every suppression. Every truth buried in archives and lies.

I wasn't done waking up.