

My Sister 270

Chapter 270 STRONG HEART

SERAPHINA'S POV

Cold engulfed me.

The suffocating weight pressed in from every direction, thick and relentless, as the sea swallowed me whole.

My body reacted before my mind could catch up: lungs spasmed, limbs thrashed as the undertow snatched me, dragging me sideways and down.

Sand scoured my skin. Water forced its way into my mouth, my nose, my throat.

Dread crashed over me.

Not new. Never new.

Old. Visceral. Familiar as my own heartbeat.

I was a child again.

The world shifted, warped by panic and memory, and suddenly the sea was gone—replaced by murky green water and the sharp shock of cold stone beneath my palms.

I was small—far too small. My limbs felt alien, weighed down by drenched fabric that clung like grasping hands.

I remembered the shove. Cruel hands at my back, sudden and vicious, laughter echoing as I stumbled, and the lake behind the Lockwood estate surged up to meet me.

Water closed over my head.

I kicked and flailed, shoes weighing me down, skirts tangling around my legs. The surface shimmered just beyond reach, light rippling above in cruel mockery.

My chest burned for air.

Panic sharpened into something terrible and lucid.

‘I’m going to die.’

The thought had come with frightening clarity, stripped of drama or fear. That awful certainty that I would disappear before I'd ever mattered.

Back then, my father had dragged me out, coughing and sobbing, crushing me to his chest as if sheer will could anchor me to the world again.

Back at the koi pond, Kieran had pulled me out.

This time—

Water flooded my lungs.

The world smeared and blurred.

Something flickered at the ragged edge of my awareness.

A woman stood on the shore.

Her face was lost to shadow; only her silhouette remained, the shape of her clothes oddly out of place in the memory. She stood unmoving, her presence remote, yet inescapable.

Then the world jolted.

Strong, unyielding arms wrapped around me, slicing through the water with ruthless efficiency. My body was yanked upward, the surface exploding as we broke through.

I gasped, choking as air crashed into my lungs—burning, painful, glorious.

I barely registered the face above me: brown hair slicked dark to his head, blue and green eyes blazing with determination and fear.

Corin.

He dragged me through the water, one arm locked around my torso as he pulled us both toward shore.

As my vision dimmed, something strange flickered at the edge of sight.

Behind him...

A flash of silver-blue.

A powerful, sleek curve—unmistakable, yet utterly impossible.

A fishtail.

Then everything went black.

When awareness returned, it did so gently.

Soft sheets cocooned me. The muted hush of a familiar room, the scent of citrus, salt, and something warm—perhaps tea—filled the air.

My chest ached with every breath, but the pain was distant, manageable.

“Sera?”

The voice was small and trembling.

I opened my eyes.

Dora stood at my bedside, eyes shining with tears too large for her small face. Her hands clutched the blanket like it was the only thing holding her together.

Relief flooded her expression the moment she saw me stir.

"She's awake," she whispered urgently, glancing over her shoulder.

Kai and Neri hovered in the doorway, guilt carved deep into their young faces. Reef lingered behind them, unusually still, hands knotted at his chest.

Dora climbed onto the bed, curling into my side and burying her face in my shoulder with a muffled sob.

I wrapped an arm around her instinctively, my own chest tightening.

"I'm okay," I rasped, my throat raw. "Hey...hey, I'm okay."

Selene rushed in moments later, Adrian close behind her.

“Oh, Sera,” she breathed, crossing the room in three quick strides. “I’m so sorry. We had an impromptu meeting to attend, but we shouldn’t have left you on your own as our guest. We should never have gone that far. We—”

Her voice broke.

Adrian’s jaw was clenched tight, his hand resting heavily on her back.

“We can’t imagine what would’ve happened,” Selene continued, eyes shining. “If Corin hadn’t been there—”

“I’m alright,” I said again, more firmly this time. “Really.”

It mattered that they believed me. I was weary of being a burden everywhere I went, and I didn’t want any tainted memories of Seabreeze.

Kai swallowed hard and stepped forward, his head bowed. “It was our idea,” he said quietly. “To play near the shore.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” I told him. “None of you did.”

Reef sniffed. “The wave came out of nowhere,” he grumbled. “That’s not fair.”

That drew a weak laugh from me.

Somewhere, in the corner of the room, I heard a sharp intake of breath.

My gaze slid past them to Corin, standing with arms folded, his expression carefully neutral.

He stiffened when our eyes met, as if surprised to be noticed.

“You saved me,” I whispered.

He gave a short nod and immediately looked away, as if embarrassed by the attention.

“Thank you,” I said softly.

He shrugged. “You’re welcome.”

Something tugged at my thoughts—an echo of that last impossible image—but before I could grasp it, Selene sighed. “We should leave you to rest and recuperate—”

Dora tightened her grip around me.

“I’m staying,” she declared. “I have to make sure Aunty Sera doesn’t disappear.”

Selene sighed. “Dora—”

“No,” I said quickly, managing a smile despite the lingering ache in my chest. “I’d like that.” I ruffled Dora’s curls. “Her company is delightful.”

Dora grinned, pressing her head into the crook of my neck. “See, Mommy? I’m delightful.”

Laughter rippled through the room, gentle and relieved, and Selene finally exhaled.

She brushed a hand over Dora’s back, her expression softening with resignation. “Very well,” she said quietly. “But no antics, okay? Sera doesn’t need any more stress.”

Dora nodded solemnly, as if accepting a sacred duty.

Selene turned back to me. “We’ll have a healer check on you again shortly,” she said. “Just to be safe.”

"I really am fine," I repeated, though my voice sounded thinner than I intended.

Adrian inclined his head. "Even so," he said gently, "humor us."

Kai straightened. "Can we stay too? We can help," he offered quickly. "Neri can get fresh water. And I can—"

"You can sit and be quiet," Selene interrupted, though there was no reprimand in her tone. "All of you."

The children obeyed at once, clustering near the foot of the bed. Reef scrambled onto a low chair, legs swinging restlessly until Neri reached out and stilled him with a gentle touch.

A healer arrived soon after, a calm, middle-aged woman who smelled faintly of herbs and the sea.

She checked my pulse, listened to my breathing, murmured reassurances while pressing warm fingers to my wrists and collarbone.

Each test ended the same: a small nod, a thoughtful hum.

"She swallowed some water," the healer said at last. "But there's no lasting damage. Strong lungs. Strong heart."

Relief swept through the room like a long-held breath finally released.

After she left, Selene brought me a cup of warm tea, coaxing me to sip slowly while Dora supervised with fierce, protective intensity.

“Too fast,” Dora warned. “You have to do it like this.” She demonstrated with an exaggerated, delicate sip of her own imaginary cup.

I smiled and obeyed.

As time slipped by, the adrenaline faded, replaced by a bone-deep weariness that seeped into my limbs.

Someone tucked the blanket higher around me. Someone else cracked the curtains, letting the last amber light of dusk spill across the room.

Eventually, Selene stood. “Alright,” she said softly. “Let’s give Sera some quiet.”

Kai rose first and lifted his little sister out of my bed. “I’ll make sure Dora doesn’t try to sneak back,” he promised.

"I wasn't going to," Dora protested, lightly hitting his chest with a small fist.

"Yes, you were," Neri said flatly, looping her arm through Reef's and steering him toward the door.

Selene lingered last. She squeezed my hand softly. "You're safe here," she said, voice low. "Please remember that."

"I do," I replied, and meant it.

She hesitated, offering me one last, guilt-tinged smile before closing the door softly behind her.

The room dimmed.

I lay there, staring at the ceiling, listening to the distant hush of the sea beyond the windows. My body ached with the dull heaviness that followed shock, but it was an ache I could bear. Proof that I was still here.

Still breathing.

When sleep finally dragged me under, it offered no rest.

Water. Darkness. Struggle.

I kicked and thrashed, lungs screaming as that same terrible certainty closed in around me—

Then a sound sliced through the panic.

A song.

Low. Gentle.

The melody wrapped around me like warm arms, soothing terror, slowing my heartbeat, guiding me upward instead of sinking down.

I woke with a gasp, sheets clammy beneath me, heart pounding.

The song, however, followed me into the waking world.

It drifted through the open balcony doors.

I pushed myself up and followed it outside.

Moonlight spilled across the stone, silver and soft.

Corin stood at the railing, his back to me, the sea stretching endless and dark beyond him.

He stopped singing the instant he sensed me.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly, not turning. "Did I wake you?"

"No," I said, my voice hoarse. "You helped."

He nodded once, a muscle jumping in his jaw. "Good."

I stepped closer. "Corin... Back there... earlier—"

He sighed. "I'm sorry, Sera."

I frowned. "You saved my life, why would you apologize?"

“Because...it was my fault.”