

My Sister 280

Chapter 280 YOU HAVE OPTIONS

SERAPHINA'S POV

I only found out about the video Selene posted when my phone began vibrating nonstop as I climbed the stairs back to my room, damp hair clinging to my neck, skin still warm from the sun.

Notifications piled up, a relentless, stuttering cascade that crowded my screen.

It lit up again and again in my palm until I couldn't tell where one notification ended and the next began. Mentions. Tags. Messages from people I didn't know. Emojis. Questions. Speculation disguised as compliments.

There was a strange dissonance in seeing myself reflected through so many unfamiliar lenses—paused mid-motion, laughing, caught in a moment I hadn't curated or armored.

A version of me that felt honest, now dissected and interpreted.

I closed the door and let my back rest against the cool wood, drawing in a slow, steadying breath.

Part of me felt startlingly exposed, as if a window I'd forgotten existed had been thrown wide open.

But beneath that, a quieter, unexpected pride flickered—not for the attention, but for the image people now saw when they looked at me.

Not withdrawn. Not suppressed. Not contained.

Alive. Thriving.

Still, the digital clamor pressed in, blurring the edges of what had been such a clean, uncomplicated joy less than an hour earlier.

So much for peace.

I kicked off my sandy flip-flops by the bed and was halfway to the bathroom when my phone rang outright—an actual call, not a message.

Maya.

My lips curved as I answered, tucking the phone between my shoulder and ear as I turned on the shower.

“Hi,” I said. “Before you say anything—”

“Oh my gods,” Maya interrupted breathlessly, “Who’s the hunk?”

I froze mid-reach for a towel. “I’m sorry, what?”

“Don’t play dumb,” she said gleefully. “I just saw the video. The volleyball one. The way he caught you? The way you two were moving together? Holy shit, babe.”

I snorted. “We were playing a game. On sand. People slip.”

“Mmhmm,” she hummed. “And lucky that there are hotties around to catch them when they do.”

I cocked my head. “Would you rather I face planted into the sand?”

She made a noise that was halfway between a laugh and a scoff. “I’m not saying anything happened. I’m saying the vibe is suspicious. And the fact that you left him out of your group chat updates? Even more so.”

I put the phone on speaker and stepped under the spray, letting the warm water cascade over me, loosening muscles that had been stressed during the game. “There is no vibe. Corin is just...Corin.”

“And who, exactly, is Corin?”

“Selene’s younger brother,” I said. “A friend.”

“Uh-huh,” Maya said. “And it’s just by the way that he looks like a Greek god.”

I groaned. “Please don’t.”

“You’re not denying it,” she sing-songed.

“Because it’s irrelevant,” I shot back. “I’m not—there’s nothing romantic there. He’s been helping me train. That’s it.”

“Train what?”

I hesitated. I knew there was no hiding my new abilities from Maya, but it didn’t feel like a conversation to have over the phone or information to drop in the group chat.

“I’ll tell you during my thorough debriefing when I’m back.”

Maya sighed theatrically. "Fine. But I'm just saying, the energy is...different."

"Different how?"

"Calm," she said after a beat. "Natural. Not careful like you are with Lucian or bracing for impact as you do with Kieran."

I turned my face into the spray, water drumming against my forehead. "Seabreeze is...peaceful," I admitted. "It's hard to be careful or on edge when everything around you keeps telling you to breathe."

"I can see that," she said softly. "You look so relaxed."

Then, with her usual irreverence, "Still. If you want to hit that before you come back, no one would blame you."

I couldn't help the laugh that burst out of me. "I can't believe you, of all people, are saying that. I thought you were Team Lucian since day one."

She made a dismissive sound. "Correction: I'm Team Sera. Whoever you choose, I support. Even if you choose to run away and become a professional beach athlete."

"That is not happening."

“Shame,” she said. “You look sexy as fuck in a swimsuit.”

I snorted. “I’m hanging up.”

“No, you’re not,” she said promptly. “We haven’t even gotten to the important part.”

I sighed and reached for my shampoo. “Which is?”

There was a brief pause, the kind that made me pay attention.

“Have you found your answer yet?” Maya asked, her tone subdued.

The water ran steadily, filling the silence.

“I don’t know,” I said finally. “But...I think it’s time for me to come home.”

Her breath softened on the other end of the line. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” I said. “I love it here. Truly. But staying any longer feels like...avoidance.”

“Well, I can’t say I’m mad about that,” she said. “I miss you so fucking much.”

I smiled. “I miss you too.”

We talked some more after that—about nothing, really. Her new neighbor. A disastrous attempt at baking that somehow almost singed Ethan’s eyebrows.

The kind of trivialities that kept us on the phone longer than necessary, neither of us wanting to be the first to let go.

Eventually, the conversation slowed, stretching thin.

“Okay, I guess I have to let you go now to the sun and sea and sexy beach gods,” Maya said.

I rolled my eyes. “You’re incorrigible.”

She giggled. “Don’t you forget that.”

“How could I ever?”

“And Sera?”

“Yeah?”

“Whatever you decide,” she said, voice steady, “remember—you’re allowed to choose yourself. And I’ll always be your number one supporter.”

I smiled. “I love you, Maya.”

“Love you too, babe.”

I stood there under the water for a long moment after we finally hung up, chest tight, before turning the shower off.

When I stepped out, a towel wrapped around me, I grabbed my phone and shuffled through the chatter to the messages I actually recognized.

There was the OTS squad group chat, blinking with messages layered one on top of the other.

Judy: Miss you so much, Sera.

Finn: Don't forget sunscreen.

Talia: OTS isn't the same without you.

Roxy: New year's coming—you better be back for it.

And then there was Lucian's message.

Lucian: The sea breeze suits you. But I hope you don't forget that Christmas is fast approaching—and we're already preparing for your homecoming.

Warmth spread through my chest, equal parts comfort and longing.

Seabreeze was a breath of fresh air, but there was a different gravity in being missed—belonging somewhere that waited for you to come back.

I typed back a quick response to both the group chat and Lucian.

Sera: Miss you too. I'll be home soon.

The phone rang almost immediately.

I hesitated only a moment before answering.

"Hey."

"Hey," Lucian replied. I could hear the smile in his voice even without seeing him. "Looks like you've been enjoying yourself."

"I have," I admitted. "Selene and her family are fantastic hosts."

"I can tell," he said lightly. "Have you decided whether you're accepting her invitation to join Seabreeze?"

The question was asked gently, but the directness caught me a little off guard.

"I..." I sat down on the edge of the bed, towel slipping loose around my shoulders.

“Of course,” he cut in quickly. “I know Seabreeze is probably amazing, but I’d be remiss not to advocate for my own pack.”

I smiled despite myself. “Naturally.”

I sighed, trying to find the right words. “Seabreeze is incredible. But it’s far. Too far from Daniel. If I had to lean one way,” I continued, “it would be toward Shadowveil.”

Lucian’s breath eased. “That’s amazing to hear.”

“But,” I added quickly, “before I decide anything, I need to go back home. To Frostbane and the Lockwoods. There are...things I still need to understand.”

His tone softened. “No pressure, Sera. I just wanted you to remember you have options.”

“I know,” I said quietly.

“You sound...heavy,” Lucian said. “Did something happen at the Origin Archives?”

I stiffened. “How—how do you know about the Origin Archives?”

There was a pause.

Then: “Kieran wasn’t the only one who came for you.”

My heart skipped.

“I didn’t interfere,” Lucian continued. “I didn’t want to overwhelm you. It was an impulsive action. I don’t regret going, but I didn’t want to influence your choices.”

My chest ached—not with anger, but with something more complicated.

Both Lucian and Kieran had come for me. Both of them had held back at the last moment.

I...

I didn’t know what to do with that information.

“I get it,” I said finally, my words a little too tight. “You were concerned for my safety.”

“I was,” he replied. “But, Sera, I never wanted to take your agency away.”

"I...I understand."

I cleared my throat. "Um, I should go. I think I hear someone calling me."

"Very well. Bye, Sera."

"Bye," I whispered.

I lay back on the bed after I hung up, staring at the ceiling as the early evening light shifted across the walls.

Alina stirred within me, her presence warm and curious.

'Have you decided yet?' she asked softly.

I swallowed. 'No.'

'That's all right,' she said. 'You're allowed to take your time.'

Did time know that? Because it was running awfully fucking fast.

I thought of Lucian—steady, honest, choosing to come clean when it mattered.

I thought of Kieran—distant, restrained, but trying in his own way to be there without crossing boundaries.

Both of them were changing, trying to be better. For me.

And somehow, that made the choice harder.

And not for the first time, I realized that whatever decision I made meant hurting someone else anyway.