

My Sister 290

Chapter 290 PATIENCE IS NON-NEGOTIABLE

SERAPHINA'S POV

I didn't give myself time to hesitate.

If I stopped long enough to think, I knew I'd talk myself into waiting—for my mother to come back, for answers to be handed to me instead of carved out through effort.

I'd already spent too many years waiting.

So I threw myself into training.

Me. Maya. And Corin—off-site but involved, guiding the process through scheduled calls and real-time video sessions, his calm precision cutting through even the worst connections.

The first time we set up in one of the OTS virtual projection simulation rooms, I was overwhelmed with awe.

Like the Arenas during the LST, the space unfolded around me in layers of light and geometry, the sterile white dissolving into something vast and alive.

The system, attached to an interface on my wrist, tracked my vitals, psychic output, and emotional fluctuations—every tremor laid bare.

“This isn’t about pushing harder,” Maya reminded me as she calibrated the magic stones she’d laid out in a careful semicircle.

Each one pulsed with a different elemental signature—earth, water, fire, wind, lunar resonance. “It’s about listening better.”

I nodded, jaw set.

In the back of my mind, I’d had the niggling sense that embarking on this new stage of my training without Lucian wasn’t right. He’d been my first teacher, after all.

I didn’t want him blindsided. I didn’t want him to think I was shutting him out—or worse, replacing him.

But every attempt to reach him had fallen short. My messages went undelivered; his phone rang unanswered.

Word was he’d left with his Beta for a nearby town—some important, time-sensitive negotiation that required his full attention.

I could have waited.

I chose not to.

Because my mother's diary hadn't just given me answers.

It had given me urgency.

Understanding why my parents made their choice didn't erase the damage it caused.

The years of emotional distance. The neglect that had crept in once I was deemed "safe." The way my existence had been quietly reshaped into something smaller, quieter, easier to manage.

My mother would eventually return from visiting Celeste.

I didn't know what she'd bring with her.

Truth—or another seal.

I refused to be caught unprepared.

“I don’t want anyone else deciding what happens to me ever again,” I said quietly as Maya handed me the first stone—a smooth, slate-gray piece thrumming with grounded energy.

Corin’s voice echoed calmly through the speaker in the room. “Then we make you a force to be reckoned with. We find your anchor.”

The curriculum they designed together looked simple on the surface—deceptively so.

Scenario-based immersion. Controlled stressors. Emotional and environmental variables layered until something clicked.

“Your anchor isn’t something you choose,” Corin explained during our first session. “It’s something that answers you.”

The room shifted.

Suddenly, I stood at the edge of a cliff, a storm-tossed sea raging below, wind clawing at my clothes and hair.

Water energy surged through the stone Maya activated, amplifying the field until it pressed against my senses like a living thing.

“Reach,” Maya instructed. “But don’t force.”

I closed my eyes and let my senses spread out, searching for some sort of answering resonance.

Nothing.

The scene dissolved, replaced by a scorched plain under a blistering sun. Fire roared at the edges of my awareness, hungry and sharp.

My breath hitched.

Still nothing.

Day after day, we cycled through environments: dense forests thick with earth magic, skies where wind howled loud enough to drown thought, endless shores where tides pulled at my ankles with a familiar, insistent promise that never quite locked into place.

Each failure chipped away at my patience.

My head throbbed. Sweat slicked my palms. Psychic fatigue seeped in like slow poison, a bone-deep exhaustion that turned every thought into a slog through mud.

“I should have found it by now,” I snapped on the third day after the fifth failed run, ripping the interface off my wrist. “I can feel everything. Why can’t I lock onto one thing?”

“Potential doesn’t equal immediacy,” Corin said softly. “Even unlimited capacity needs time to repair, to rewire. You’re rebuilding pathways that were forcibly shut down for years. Patience is non-negotiable.”

I pressed my hands to my temples, breathing hard.

“I don’t have years,” I groaned.

“No,” Corin agreed gently. “But you do have today. And tomorrow.”

We ended the session before I collapsed again.

By the time I dragged myself from the projection room, my legs wobbled, as if they’d forgotten how to hold me up.

Maya pressed a bottle of water into my hand, her eyes sharp and searching—the look she wore when worry gnawed at her, but she refused to voice it.

“You did good,” she said.

I laughed weakly. “By failing repeatedly?”

“By getting back up repeatedly,” she replied.

I smiled, leaning against her as we walked. “I couldn’t do any of this without you.”

She squeezed my shoulder. “Don’t worry, you never have to.”

I broke away from Maya at the corridor fork that led to the locker room, muscles buzzing with leftover strain. Each step dragged, my body unconvinced that the ordeal was over.

That was when I nearly walked into him.

I stopped short with a soft, surprised breath. “Oh—”

Lucian halted at the same time, his hand lifting instinctively as if to steady me before he caught himself and let it fall back to his side.

For a second, we just stood there.

He looked like he'd just come off a red-eye flight without the benefit of sleep.

His coat hung on his shoulders, still buttoned despite the warmth inside, his posture slumped, shadows sitting stubbornly beneath his eyes.

"Lucian," I said, recovering first.

"Sera." His gaze swept over me in a quick, practiced assessment, no doubt noticing the faint sheen of sweat at my temple, the way my hands hadn't quite stopped shaking.

"You're back," I added unnecessarily.

"I just got in," he replied. His voice was steady, but there was a tightness under it, like a wire pulled too taut. "I heard you were on-site."

I nodded. "Yeah. I—" I hesitated, then decided not to. "I started training again."

The corner of his lips twitched. "Yeah, I gathered."

I exhaled. "I hope you're not upset that I didn't inform you beforehand. I tried to, but—"

He waved away the rest of my sentence. "Don't be ridiculous, Sera. OTS is your home, and you don't need my permission to train. Especially not with Maya." His smile widened. "I don't know if you know this, but you both are pretty much celebrities here."

I let out a huff of laughter. "Okay, good."

"So," he said, tucking his hands into his coat pockets, "how's it going? I heard you two have been using the simulation room more and more."

I nodded. "She and Corin are helping me to—"

"Corin?"

The temperature seemed to drop.

"Um...yeah." I didn't know why I was suddenly nervous. "Selene's younger brother. Remember I mentioned him? He was invaluable to me in Seabreeze. He—"

"So this," Lucian cut in, jaw tightening, composure slipping just enough for something raw and harsh to show through, "is your answer then?"

I paused. Frowned. "I'm...I'm not sure I follow."

"You said you'd give me your choice after you returned," he hissed, voice trembling with barely leashed emotions, "and I've been waiting with my breath held, but now you come back with your attention diverted to yet another man you only knew for a couple of days?"

I was so stunned that my jaw actually dropped.

Lucian instantly regretted his words.

I saw it in the minute change of his expression—the tightening at the corners of his eyes, the faint recoil like he wanted to pull the words back into himself.

But it was already too late; the damage had been done.

'Yet another man.'

The way he'd said it—heated, edged with something dangerously close to contempt—stung far more than I'd expected.

My chest tightened, heat flaring.

I laughed once, short and incredulous. "Is that really what you think of me?"

Lucian blinked. "Sera—"

"No," I cut in, my voice steady but brittle. "Get it all off your chest. That I'm just...what? Casually drifting from one man to another because I can't make up my mind? That's the kind of woman you think I am?"

He stiffened, color draining from his face as the full implication hit him.

"That's not what I meant."

"But it's what you implied." I folded my arms, grounding myself in the physicality of the movement.
"And it's insulting."

Lucian's jaw worked, frustration flashing in his eyes—at me, at himself, I couldn't tell.

"I was out of line." His voice was lower now, stripped of its earlier bite.

"I've been...on edge," he admitted, running a hand through his hair. "More than usual. That's not your fault."

I searched his face, and all I saw was exhaustion—raw and unguarded, the kind that seeps into bone and hollows you out from within.

Still, it didn't excuse the way he'd spoken to me.

I crossed my arms. "I'm not some floozy hopping from man to man."

"I know that," he sighed, running a hand across his jaw. "I do. I wasn't thinking clearly. I'm sorry, Sera."

I exhaled, some of the tension bleeding out of me.

We stood there for a moment, neither of us speaking, the corridor quietly alive around us. Footsteps echoed somewhere distant. Voices rose and fell.

Finally, I spoke, voice tight. "You should go home."

Lucian blinked. "Excuse me?"

“You’re obviously exhausted,” I continued, “and in no shape to have a conversation.”

“Sera—”

“Meet me Friday.”

His brows lifted. “Friday?”

“Yes.” I swallowed, nerves fluttering low in my chest. “I’ll give you my answer then.”

Something unreadable crossed his face—hope, fear, anticipation tangled too tightly to separate.

“Your choice,” he said carefully.

“My choice,” I confirmed.

Lucian nodded, the weight of that settling visibly on his shoulders. “Then I’ll wait.”

He paused, then added quietly, “And Sera? I’m sorry. Truly.”

I met his eyes. "I know."

He turned and walked away, his steps measured but sharp.

I watched him leave, my chest heavy but oddly calm.

Friday.

For better or worse, it was time to make this choice.