

My Sister 296

Chapter 296 WELCOME BACK

SERAPHINA'S POV

The room was hushed, dawn's light faintly pressing against my eyelids. My body throbbed with that deep, echoing ache left behind when a fever finally broke—heavy, spent, but no longer aflame.

I opened my eyes slowly.

Like a *déjà vu* moment, Maya was curled in the chair beside my bed, her boots discarded near the wall, her jacket draped over the armrest.

Her head drooped forward, dark braids spilling across her face, one hand still loosely tangled with mine as if she feared letting go, even in sleep.

For a moment, my vision blurred.

The edges of the present wavered, and suddenly I was small again, my body too light beneath thick blankets.

The bed felt larger, the ceiling higher. A lamp burned low at the corner of the room, casting amber light over a familiar silhouette seated exactly where Maya sat now.

Margaret Lockwood, younger than I remembered her ever being. No silver in her hair yet. No lines carved deep by years of careful restraint.

She sat rigid in the chair, hands knotted in her lap, eyes fixed on me as if her gaze alone could hold me together.

“Oh, my sweet little girl,” she whispered. “I’m so sorry.”

The ache in my chest sharpened.

I blinked, and the vision dissolved.

A soft, pearlescent glow hovered by the headboard, unwavering and serene. One Lunewing butterfly floated in lazy circles, wings sweeping slow and sure, while its companion perched near the crystal enclosure, its light pulsing in quiet rhythm with my breath.

Relief unspooled in my chest, only to coil tight again as gratitude and ache twined together, inseparable.

I was grateful for the Lunewings—their steady light, their gentle gravity, the way they kept me tethered to myself when everything else felt like it was shifting.

But the gratitude came with a shadow.

Because now I knew who had sent them.

The thought of Kieran surfaced unbidden, tugging painfully at a place inside me that hadn't finished healing.

I wondered how he was—whether the bond's severance had hollowed him out the way it had me, whether the pain was clawing at him as relentlessly as it had clawed at me.

At that point, Maya stirred. Her head snapped up, eyes instantly alert, fear flaring before relief chased it away.

“Sera,” she breathed.

Then she was up, leaning over me, arms circling my shoulders in a careful hug, as if too much pressure might break me to pieces.

“You’re awake,” she said, voice thick. “Gods, you scared me. We really need to not make this a pattern. I swear, I can’t handle it.”

I managed a weak smile, my throat parched. "Deal."

"How do you feel?"

I swallowed. "I thought I saw my mom."

Maya stilled, then softened. She pulled back just enough to look at me. "You dreamt about her?"

I shook my head. "No, I saw her. Sitting where you were. Watching me sleep."

Maya placed a hand on my forehead. "You don't have a fever anymore, but maybe hallucinations are an aftereffect?"

"Are you calling me crazy?"

She smiled. "Don't move. I'll get Tallulah."

As if I had any intention or strength to do otherwise.

Before I could respond, the door swung open.

Ethan filled the doorway, arms folded, eyes rimmed with exhaustion but still sharp. Relief flickered over his face when he saw me awake.

“Thank the goddess,” he breathed.

He moved closer, dragging a chair to my bedside. He winced as he sat, and I caught the faint bruise blooming along his jaw and just above his shirt collar.

“What the hell happened to you?” I rasped.

“Accident,” he answered.

Maya snorted. “Yeah, he tripped and fell onto Ashar’s claws.”

“Maya,” Ethan groaned.

“What?” She gave him a faux-innocent smile. “You said you wanted total honesty from me henceforth, no?”

“I meant—” he sighed. “Never mind. I thought you were getting the healer?”

She leaned down and kissed his bruised cheek. "Be right back."

He watched her leave, his exasperation giving way to affection.

Then he turned to me and his face tightened with concern. "How are you feeling?"

"You fought with Ashar?" I asked instead.

Ethan shook his head. "It's nothing. I was able to calm him down. Don't worry about it."

But it was too late for that.

I remembered the wound I'd seen on Kieran's chest. Gods, I hoped Ashar would not punish him so harshly again.

"Is...is Kieran okay?"

Ethan managed a reassuring smile. "He will be."

I swallowed. “And Daniel?”

“Safe with Leona and Christian. I checked in on him before coming back, and decided it was best for him to stay there till you’re back on your feet.”

I reached for Ethan’s hand and squeezed. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For taking care of me,” I said softly.

His shoulders sagged just a little. “It’s long overdue. I’ve been an absentee brother for too long.”

Before I could reply, Maya returned, ushering Tallulah into the room.

The healer brought with her the scent of herbs and fresh rain, her expression warm and watchful as she neared the bed.

“Well,” Tallulah said gently, fingers pressing lightly to my wrist, then my forehead where a Lunewing lazily perched. “Your fever has broken. The worst of the bond backlash has passed. Welcome back, Lady Sera.”

Maya exhaled loudly, tension draining from her shoulders. "Thank fuck."

Tallulah shot her a mildly reproachful look. "Colorful language is unbecoming, dear, but I appreciate the sentiment."

I blinked up at her. "It's really you, Lula."

A smile touched her lips. "It's really me. Quite frankly, I'm surprised you remember me, but then again, you were very keen even as a little girl."

I studied her face, memory stirring at the edges. "You were...there. When I was a child."

"I was," she said. "Your parents consulted many healers when your powers began to manifest. I was one of the few who disagreed with sealing your abilities."

Speaking of the sealing, aloud and unhidden in this house, shifted something in the room.

Lockwood Manor had always been heavy with unspoken things, but this was different. This wasn't silence anymore. It was disturbance.

I saw it in the way Maya's shoulders tensed. In the way Ethan's jaw set, his eyes darting to the door as if expecting our parents to barge in and shut down the conversation.

"But," Tallulah continued, "I understood why your parents chose it. You were too young. Too exposed. And the world is not kind to gifted children who cannot protect themselves."

A shadow crossed her face. "I only regret that I wasn't skilled enough back then to offer a safer alternative. Perhaps if I had been, you wouldn't have had to endure so much confusion and heartache later."

Her words landed with weight in the room.

"The sealing didn't just affect you," she said gently, hands stilling over the crystal at my collarbone. "It fractured everyone involved. Your parents carried that choice like a fault line through their marriage."

She turned to Ethan and gave him a small, sympathetic smile. "Your brother felt it, even if he didn't understand it at the time. And you..."

She met my eyes. "You lived with the consequences."

"But...there's more. Right?"

My mother's diary had explained the why—the fear, the risks, the impossible decisions made in the name of protection.

But I knew it hadn't explained everything.

There were gaps.

I felt them like missing teeth—spaces my mind kept worrying at, unable to leave alone.

"I figured you wouldn't be satisfied with just the diary," Ethan said from my bedside, voice rough around the edges.

I huffed weakly. "How can I?"

The puzzle pieces of my life were finally clicking into place. How could I stop before I saw the whole picture?

His mouth twitched, but his eyes stayed serious. "I don't expect you to. You deserve the truth. I didn't want you filling in the blanks with the worst possibilities."

So he hadn't waited.

While I traveled, trying to stitch myself whole again, Ethan had been digging through the past in his own way.

"I started looking for people who were there," he continued. "Healers. Advisors. Anyone who had a hand in the decision—or argued against it."

Tallulah inclined her head slightly. "He was persistent."

Ethan let out a humorless breath. "That's one word for it."

He told me how some doors had closed the moment he knocked. How others opened reluctantly, guilt etched into faces that had aged along with the secret. How not everyone agreed with our parents' choice, but very few had believed there was a better one at the time.

"They all remembered you," he said, quieter now. "Not as a problem or a danger. As a child—a delightful one at that."

I managed a smile.

"I didn't know what you'd need," he admitted. "Or if you'd even want it. But I thought...when you're ready, having more than just Mom's version might matter."

It did.

Because this wasn't about blame anymore.

It was about truth. About reclaiming the parts of my story that had been decided without me, and refusing to let them stay buried just because they were uncomfortable.

I reached out and squeezed Ethan's hand. "Thank you."

He squeezed back, once, firm and grounding.

"I should've been paying attention," he said. "To you. To what didn't make sense."

I met his gaze. "You are now."

He nodded, eyes briefly shining before he looked away. Then he cleared his throat and reached into his jacket.

"There's one more thing," he said, voice husky. "Something I found in Father's office. Hidden behind the false panel."

He handed me a thick, heavy envelope. "It's something that belongs to you—long overdue."