

My Sister 358

Chapter 358 A REQUEST

SERAPHINA'S POV

Mere weeks ago, my first instinct would have been to pull away from Kieran. To spare Lucian the hurt of seeing me with the person I'd chosen instead of him.

I made no attempt to disguise the truth now.

His gaze dropped to our intertwined hands. I didn't pull away as Kieran's thumb stroked once across my knuckles.

Lucian's nose twitched. I knew that by now, Astrid's perfume had worn off.

There was no mistaking what he saw. What he smelled.

Something flickered across his face.

It was not anger or shock.

It was...despondency, self-mockery.

As if he had expected this outcome all along and hated himself for hoping otherwise.

The flicker was gone in a heartbeat. His expression smoothed into his usual polished composure.

“Well,” he said lightly, as though we were meeting at a social gala. “I hope I’m not interrupting.”

Kieran’s grip tightened.

“What you’re doing is trespassing,” he replied evenly.

I stepped forward without disentangling my hand from Kieran’s.

“Lucian,” I said quietly. “What are you doing here?”

“I was hoping to speak with you.” He hesitated, glancing at Kieran. “Alone.”

Kieran went still behind me.

I turned to face him and squeezed his hand.

“It’s okay,” I murmured.

His jaw flexed, muscles tensing as he bit down on a response.

I knew after today—after the clash with the rogues and with Corin—the last thing he wanted was to leave me alone with Lucian. But to his credit, he didn’t make a fuss and gave a short nod.

“I’ll be by the car,” he said.

Within sight and earshot. Something told me that was as much as he was willing to budge.

Lucian inclined his head, acknowledging the boundary.

Gaze trained on Lucian, Kieran raised our joined hands and pressed a lingering kiss to my knuckles, his lips warm against my skin.

I wanted to be irritated by the juvenile show, but I was too busy holding back a shiver of desire.

Kieran stepped back and leaned against the hood of his car, arms crossing loosely over his chest. Casual in posture only.

I climbed the steps slowly and joined Lucian beneath the porch light.

Up close, I could see him more clearly.

He also looked better than the last time I'd seen him.

The shadows beneath his eyes were fainter. The rigid strain that had once pulled at his mouth had eased.

But the weight remained, clinging to him like a second coat.

"You look better," I said gently.

He huffed a soft laugh. "That's a diplomatic way of saying I looked like hell before."

I shrugged. "Hell would be putting it lightly."

He laughed again, and for a heartbeat, there was no strain between us. No distance or secrets.

The moment was gone as soon as it came.

“I won’t take much of your time,” Lucian said, sobering up. “I’m leaving.”

My stomach dipped. “Again?”

He nodded. “Again. For quite a while.”

The wind shifted, cool against my skin. I folded my arms, suddenly craving Kieran’s warmth, though he was mere feet away.

“I didn’t want to leave,” Lucian continued, “without a goodbye like last time.”

Last time.

Memories of waiting in restaurants and cafes surfaced, and I tightened my arms around myself.

“You deserved better,” he said quietly.

My chest tightened.

“I’m glad you came,” I said.

“There’s something else,” he added, shifting slightly. “I know it’s shameless; I know you owe me nothing, but I have...a request.”

I stilled.

“What kind of request?”

He reached inside his coat and withdrew a small velvet pouch. From it, he removed a heavy signet seal—onyx, silver-edged, with the OTS crest etched deep into its surface.

He held it out to me. “I need you to take this.”

I blinked. “The OTS seal?”

“Yes.”

My brows drew together. “Lucian...that grants authority to mobilize your entire network.”

“I’m aware.”

“Why would you give it to me?”

“Because I won’t be here,” he said simply. “I don’t anticipate disaster, but I’d rather not leave things...unguarded.”

I frowned. “But Maya would be a more appropriate choice. She’s practically your second in command already.”

He shrugged. “Maya is soon to become the Luna of another pack. One that has little to no affiliation with OTS.”

“So?”

“If the acting authority of OTS were tied by marriage to another Alpha, it would create a conflict of interest. Questions of allegiance.”

He stepped closer, gently uncrossed my arms, and lowered the seal into my open palm.

“You,” he said, “are unattached.”

Behind us, I could feel Kieran’s attention sharpen.

“Lucian—”

“At least on paper,” he amended. “Plus, you’re the champion of the LST; no one would question your authority.”

“Still—”

“I don’t expect you to manage day-to-day affairs,” he interrupted gently. “You’re already stretched thin. I know that.”

I thought of Vidar. Of Astrid and the USB burning a hole in my purse. Of the rogues. Of Marcus and Jack. Of the psychic network murmuring about neutralization. Of Celeste.

Gods, the list seemed endless.

'Stretched thin' was an understatement.

"I only need you to hold on to it," Lucian continued. "You don't have to do anything unless something goes wrong or if OTS requires decisive action."

I stared down at the seal. It was heavier than it looked.

"You really trust me with this?" I asked quietly.

"Without a doubt," he replied.

The sincerity in his tone made the seal heavier. I closed my fingers around it.

"Even without this," I said, "if anything happened to OTS, I wouldn't sit idly by."

His shoulders eased as a breath left him—one I hadn't realized he'd been holding.

"I know."

Beneath his relief, tension still coiled inside him. That wrongness still threaded his psyche.

“Lucian, what trouble are you in?” The question was out before I could stop myself.

He clenched his jaw and looked away. His fingers flexed once at his side. His throat worked.

For a moment, I thought he might answer.

Then he shook his head. “Now isn’t the right time.”

A sharp ache twisted through me—worry slashing through the frustration. Why wouldn’t he let me in?

“You don’t have to carry everything alone,” I pressed.

A pained smile ghosted his mouth. “Don’t I?”

“Lucian,” I whispered.

He straightened. “I should go.”

He turned away, but before he could take a step, I called out. "Wait."

He stopped.

I slipped my purse from my shoulder and rummaged inside. My fingers brushed leather and fabric until they closed around cool metal and stone.

The bracelet he'd given me at Christmas.

It had served its purpose; it had steadied me, anchored me through long, fractured nights.

I stepped closer and gently caught his wrist.

He stiffened slightly, startled, but did not pull away.

Without a word, I fastened the bracelet around his wrist.

The beads caught the porch light, shimmering faintly.

“This helped me,” I said softly. “More than you know.”

His gaze dropped to it.

“I’ve added moonstones to it,” I continued. “It quiets the mind. Eases restlessness.”

He looked up at me slowly.

“If you won’t let me share in your burden,” I said, voice gentle but firm, “then let this carry some of it in my stead.”

Emotion moved across his features—gratitude, conflict, longing.

“I don’t deserve this,” he murmured, his fingers brushing the bracelet.

“After everything you’ve done for me,” I whispered, “it’s the least I can do.”

Something else passed across his face, but I couldn’t read it. He stepped back slowly.

“Thank you,” he said.

Then he descended the steps.

As he passed Kieran, he slowed and leaned in, his shoulders angling toward Kieran.

He said something under his breath, too low for me to catch, but I saw Kieran's jaw clench.

Lucian straightened.

For a moment, the two Alphas regarded each other—no hostility, but no warmth either.

Then Lucian walked toward his car.

I stood on the porch and watched him as he slid in.

The engine started. Headlights flared.

And then he was gone.

Kieran ascended the steps.

"What did he say?" I asked quietly.

"That he won't interfere," Kieran answered through clenched teeth. "But if I ever hurt you again, he won't stay still."

My breath caught. Underneath everything, warmth woke in my chest, lingering as Kieran reached for my hand.

"I won't, you know," he said. "And not because of some bullshit threat."

He pulled me to his chest, cradling my head. "I will never, ever hurt you again. I swear on my life."

I closed my eyes, revelling in the steady thump of his heartbeat. "I know."