

My Sister 388

Chapter 388 NEUTRAL GROUND

SERAPHINA'S POV

Three days.

That was all we allowed ourselves.

Time had the peculiar habit of moving too quickly when you needed it to slow down.

It slipped away in a blur of intense training, strategic discussions, and long stretches of silence, during which we never voiced what lingered beneath the surface.

Worry.

Because the longer we stalled, the longer my mother stayed imprisoned and alone and entirely at the mercy of the woman who had once been her closest friend.

On the morning of the third day, I stood in the Frostbane strategy room, phone in hand, every gaze fixed on me as I prepared to make the call.

Kieran stood beside the window with his arms crossed, the early sunlight outlining the hard line of his shoulders.

Ethan leaned against the far wall, his expression carefully neutral, though the tightness in his jaw betrayed his emotions.

Corin sat calmly at the table, fingers loosely interlaced as though this were any other day, any other conversation.

Maya, Brett, and Maris lingered nearby, their attention fixed on me with quiet intensity.

When I finally pressed the call button, the ringing seemed unnaturally loud in the still room.

On the fourth ring, the line connected.

“Well,” Catherine’s voice drifted through the speaker. “Seraphina. You certainly took your time.”

Her tone was smooth and warm in the way a blade might feel smooth and warm as it slid between someone’s ribs.

I kept my voice steady. “You wanted to meet.”

Catherine chuckled. "Nothing would make me happier, dear."

"How do I know my mother is safe?" I asked, my grip on the phone tightening.

"Well, you'll have to see for yourself now, won't you?"

I shook my head even if she couldn't see me. "No. I'm not coming to the Maldives. We'll meet on neutral ground. I'll send you the details shortly."

A small pause followed.

Then Catherine laughed again, though the sound held a sharper edge now. "Even as a child, you were formidable. I look forward to seeing the powerful woman you've become."

"Do you agree or not?" I snapped.

Another pause stretched across the line, though this one felt more deliberate.

"Very well," she said finally. "Neutral ground it is."

Her agreement came so easily that suspicion immediately knotted in my stomach, but I didn't press.

"I'll send the details soon."

"I'll be on the edge of my seat."

Just before I hung up, she called out. "Seraphina?"

"Yes?"

The humor in her voice dropped out. "Remember, come alone."

I glanced around the room—at my friends, my family.

"Noted."

The morning of the meeting arrived beneath a pale, quiet sky.

The packhouse was still wrapped in the soft calm that came just before sunrise when I stepped into the kitchen.

For a moment, I simply stood there, listening to the silence of the sleeping house and gathering my thoughts.

Then I began preparing breakfast.

The simple routine grounded me in a way strategy meetings and battle plans never could.

I cracked eggs into the pan while the scent of butter warmed the air, slicing fruit and toasting bread the way Daniel liked it.

While the eggs cooked, I moved around the kitchen, preparing a few extra dishes that could be stored in the refrigerator for later—containers of pasta salad, roasted vegetables, and a tray of baked chicken that could be reheated easily.

A few minutes later, I heard the familiar patter of small footsteps in the hallway.

"Mom?" Daniel appeared in the doorway, rubbing sleep from his eyes. "You're up early."

“So are you,” I replied with a faint smile.

He wandered over and climbed into his chair at the table while I placed his plate in front of him.

“This is a lot,” he noted, eyeing the other dishes on the counter.

“It’s so you can have a taste of my cooking when you miss me,” I told him.

He stilled, fork halfway to his mouth. “Why would I miss you?”

“Your father and I are taking a short trip,” I explained gently.

He blinked at me. “Where?”

“Just something I need to take care of.”

Daniel studied my face for a moment with seriousness. “Will you be gone long? Like last time?”

“No,” I said, reaching out to brush a strand of hair from his forehead. “I’ll be back soon, I promise.”

He nodded slowly, absently pushing food around his plate, his gaze flicking up at me with the worry he tried to hide.

After a moment, I reached into my pocket and placed something carefully on the table between us.

The small brass compass caught the early light from the window.

Daniel's eyes widened. "You still have that?"

"Of course I do." I smiled. "It's my most prized possession."

I could still remember the fierce concentration on his young face as he gave it to me, insisting that every traveler needed a compass so they would always find their way home.

"You see?" I said softly. "That means you're coming with me."

Daniel's expression brightened immediately.

He leaned forward and wrapped his arms around me in a tight hug.

I held him close, breathing in the familiar sweet warmth of him while a quiet prayer formed deep inside me that the promise I had just made would not turn into a lie.

"I'll see you soon," I murmured.

"Be careful," he said, tightening his grip on my shirt.

"I will."

The journey toward the meeting point took several hours.

Kieran drove while I watched the forest slide past the window as the road carried us steadily north.

Behind us, Ethan followed in a second vehicle with Corin, Maya, Brett, and Maris.

The silence inside the car was not uncomfortable, though it carried a certain weight. Maybe because every mile brought us closer to a moment none of us were looking forward to.

Kieran reached across the console at one point and covered my hand with his.

“We’re close,” he said.

I nodded, my gaze still fixed on the passing trees.

Soon the forest began to thin, and the distant scent of salt drifted through the cracked window, carried inland by the ocean breeze.

Kieran eventually slowed down along a narrow stretch of road bordered by tall pines before bringing the car to a stop.

For a moment, neither of us moved. The engine ticked softly as it cooled.

I was reaching for the door handle when Kieran’s hand closed gently around my wrist.

“Sera.”

I turned toward him.

Up close, the concern in his dark eyes was impossible to miss. He studied my face for a moment as though committing every detail to memory.

“You’re not alone out there,” he said. “No matter what it looks like.”

I exhaled. “I know.”

His thumb brushed across the back of my hand.

“Even if you can’t see me. I’m here. I’ll always, always have your back.”

My mouth curved. “I know that too.”

The tension in his shoulders eased, and then he leaned closer.

His hand slid up to cradle the side of my face, warm and steady, and when he kissed me, it was slow and certain, carrying both reassurance and promise.

When he pulled back, he pressed his forehead to mine.

“Come back to me,” he murmured.

“I will,” I whispered.

He searched my face one last time before he released my hand.

“This is where you get out,” he said quietly.

I opened the door and stepped onto the gravel as the second vehicle pulled up behind us.

Everyone else filed out.

We stood together in the cool morning air, the quiet forest stretching around us.

“You don’t have to face her alone,” Ethan said, his fists clenched at his sides.

“You know I do,” I replied calmly.

Corin stepped forward then, his expression thoughtful as his power unfolded around us like a subtle ripple in the air.

A strange stillness settled over the clearing.

“We’ll stick to the plan,” he promised. “Everything will be okay.”

I nodded, giving him a grateful smile.

Kieran stepped closer to me, and I met his eyes, an unspoken reassurance passing between us before he stepped back.

I turned toward the narrow path leading through the trees, the compass resting warm in my pocket.

Anyone watching from a distance would have believed I had come exactly as Catherine demanded: alone.

Yet as I began walking toward the rendezvous point, I could feel the faint presence of my pack moving silently through the forest behind me, hidden beneath Corin’s psychic veil and ready to act the moment anything went wrong.

The trees parted gradually ahead.

And somewhere beyond them, Catherine was waiting.