

My Sister 389

Chapter 389 LEVERAGE

SERAPHINA'S POV

The trees thinned until the forest gave way to a narrow stretch of coastal grassland, where the earth sloped toward the distant sound of waves.

The scent of salt hung in the air, sharp and clean, carried inland by a steady breeze that tugged lightly at my hair as I stepped out from beneath the shadow of the pines.

Catherine was already there.

She stood near the center of the clearing, her posture relaxed—one hand resting loosely at her side, the other holding a slim phone.

From a distance, she might have been mistaken for a woman enjoying the cool evening air rather than the architect of the nightmare that had drawn us here.

Even as I approached, she watched with quiet amusement, her gaze sweeping over me in slow appraisal, as if observing a particularly interesting specimen.

Unlike me, she looked entirely at ease.

Every instinct inside me remained alert, every sense sharpened by the knowledge that danger surrounded this woman like an invisible force field.

Yet Catherine stood as if we had arranged nothing more than a casual meeting between acquaintances.

When I finally stopped a few paces away, she smiled.

“Seraphina,” she said warmly. “You’ve grown.”

Her voice carried the same cold sweetness I remembered.

I did not return the smile.

“Where is my mother?”

Catherine tutted. “No greeting? No polite conversation before business?”

“You’re holding my mother hostage,” I replied coldly. “We’re well past polite conversation.”

The smile on her lips did not fade.

“You’ve become very direct,” she observed. “I suppose power tends to strip away manners. A shame; you used to be such a sweet girl.”

“I didn’t come here to talk about my personality,” I said through gritted teeth.

For a moment, Catherine studied me, amusement in her eyes sharpening to something analytical.

“Yes,” she murmured. “I can see that.”

Her gaze drifted across the clearing, then returned to me. “You did come alone.”

Her words sounded casual, but I felt the subtle pressure behind them, as if she were testing for something hidden.

Corin’s concealment held steady.

I could not sense the others, but I knew they were there, silent among the trees.

"I told you I would," I said.

Catherine nodded. "You look as though you're expecting me to try something unpleasant."

"I am."

She laughed softly. "I appreciate honesty."

My patience was already wearing thin.

"Where is my mother?" I repeated.

She waved away the question like it was a pesky fly. "Oh, she's fine."

"I want proof."

Catherine tapped the phone lightly against her palm as though considering my request.

For a long moment, she did nothing.

Then, with a small sigh that suggested mild disappointment, she lifted the phone and swiped the screen.

“If you insist.”

She turned the screen toward me.

The image flickered once before stabilizing.

My breath caught.

Margaret Lockwood appeared on the screen.

She sat in what looked like a small stone room, the lighting dim but clear enough for me to see the exhaustion etched across her face.

Her hair hung loose around her shoulders, and though she was upright, there was a weakness in the way she held herself that suggested she had been confined there for days.

“Mother!” I gasped.

Her head lifted, her gaze darting around the room. “Seraphina?”

The sound of her voice struck somewhere deep inside my chest.

“I’m here,” I said.

Although I didn’t know if she could see me, since the feed looked like it was from a CCTV camera.

My mother sighed, dropping her gaze. “You shouldn’t have gone to meet her.”

My heart tightened. “I didn’t have a choice.”

Her expression softened, a mix of relief and worry. “Are you safe?”

I choked out a laugh. “I’m the one who should be asking you that.”

She managed a small smile. “I’m fine, dear.”

Catherine's voice drifted into the conversation.

"You see?" she said. "Perfectly fine."

I ignored her.

"Are you hurt?" I asked my mother.

She hesitated for the briefest fraction of a second before she said, "No."

But the pause told me everything.

Before I could ask another question, the screen went dark.

Catherine lowered the phone. "Time's up."

The tension in my body surged, my hands curling at my sides, nails pressing into my palms as I struggled to contain my frustration.

"That was barely a minute."

“Yes,” Catherine said with a shrug. “Real-time communication is such a fragile luxury. If you want to see her in person, you’ll need to come with me.”

“To your experimental lab in the Maldives.”

She didn’t look shocked that I knew about the experiments. She just smiled again.

“Exactly.”

I did not even consider the offer. “No.”

Catherine’s expression shifted.

Not anger. Not even irritation.

Something closer to curiosity.

“You refuse?”

“You abducted my mother and expect me to walk into your territory alone,” I said. “That’s not a negotiation. That’s a trap.”

Her lips curved again. “Very perceptive.”

“It’s common sense.”

Catherine studied me with increasing interest, as though recalculating an equation after adding a new variable.

“I didn’t realize you were so selfish,” she said.

I reeled. “Excuse me?”

“You don’t want to risk yourself for your own mother?”

I scoffed. “That’s not the issue.”

She cocked a brow. “Then what is?”

"I don't know what you'll do to my mother once you have me," I said. "For all I know, she's only safe as long as you don't have me."

"Who says I won't harm her simply because you refuse to cooperate?" she asked.

My eyes narrowed. "Touch a single hair on her head, and any deal that can be made between us is dead."

Her eyes narrowed. "You've grown difficult."

"I've grown careful."

A breeze moved through the clearing, stirring the grass around our feet.

For a few seconds, Catherine said nothing, but I could practically see the gears in her mind turning.

She had expected something else.

Compliance.

Emotion.

Perhaps desperation.

Instead, she had found resistance.

“You’re not groveling,” she said slowly.

“No.”

“Even though your mother remains in my custody.”

“I’ve confirmed she’s alive.”

“And that’s enough for you?”

“For now.”

The words seemed to genuinely surprise her.

“You’re willing to wait.”

“I’m willing to see more good faith from you before I make any major decisions.”

Her gaze sharpened again, though this time the amusement returned as well.

“How very strategic of you.”

I did not answer.

For a moment, the only sounds in the clearing were the distant roar of the ocean and the whisper of the breeze.

Then Catherine sighed. “Well, this is not how I imagined our reunion.”

“Kidnapping tends to complicate things,” I said dryly.

She laughed again, though the sound carried a faint edge now.

She watched me for a while, her expression shifting through several subtle calculations.

Then she spoke again.

“You know,” she said thoughtfully, “I expected Margaret to be enough leverage.”

“Sorry to disappoint you,” I said derisively.

Catherine’s smile returned fully.

“That’s okay,” she murmured. “I like a challenge.”

She tapped the phone lightly against her palm again, the gesture almost playful.

“In that case,” she continued, “perhaps I should offer you something more compelling.”

My attention sharpened. “And what would that be?”

“If Margaret alone isn’t enough to convince you...”

She paused deliberately.

“...what about Edward?”