

## **My Sister 408**

Chapter 408 Z-01

SERAPHINA'S POV

The last line blurred before my eyes.

Do not trust me.

The words pressed into me, heavy and suffocating, as if trying to take root beneath my ribs.

For a long moment, I didn't move. I didn't breathe.

The letter trembled in my hands, the paper whispering under the strain of my grip, but I barely felt it.

My mind had already fractured into too many directions at once, each thought crashing into the next before it could fully form.

Lucian.

Marcus.

Zara.

My cousin.

The word echoed strangely in my head, foreign and intimate all at once. Cousin. Bloodline. Shared power.

I stared down at the ink again as if it might rearrange itself into something that made more sense if I just looked long and hard enough.

It didn't.

Instead, everything unraveled further.

Lucian had known from the beginning.

Not just who I was—but what. What ran through my veins. What I could become.

A sharp ache seized my chest.

Every conversation, every piece of guidance, every moment he had stood beside me had been based on a lie.

Or worse—calculation. Manipulation

My stomach turned at that.

“No,” I whispered under my breath.

It wasn't that simple; it couldn't be.

It might have started as a ploy, but I knew Lucian cared about me. No one was that good an actor.

My fingers curled tighter around the letter, creasing the edge.

“Sera.”

Kieran's voice cut through the noise in my head, low and steady. He was close enough that I could feel his warmth seep into me.

I didn't look up immediately; I wasn't sure what he would see on my face.

Instead, I focused on breathing.

In. Out.

Slow. Controlled. Measured.

I tried to calm my thoughts, to find something solid to anchor myself to.

But it felt like everything was shifting.

"Sera," Kieran repeated, gentler this time, his hand coming to rest lightly against my arm.

There—solid.

I closed my eyes and took a long, deep breath. Long enough to gather the pieces of myself that had scattered too far.

When I opened them again, the world felt...clearer.

I forced my grip to loosen, and the paper straightened again, but the crease remained—a thin, permanent scar across the margin.

Fitting.

“I’m fine.” The lie slipped out smoothly.

Kieran didn’t call me on it, but I felt the shift in him anyway—the way his presence adjusted, closer without crowding, steady without pressing. He knew what I was doing.

He’d seen me do it before.

With Celeste.

With my parents.

With everything that had tried to break me before I was ready to deal with it.

Compartmentalize.

Survive first.

Feel later.

My jaw tightened as I folded the letter and set it aside on the counter.

I would deal with Lucian's secrets later.

Right now...

I glanced down at the open box again and reached into it.

The documents were thicker than they had looked at first glance, layered in uneven stacks—some neatly bound, others hastily clipped together, a few marked with annotations in Lucian's unmistakable handwriting.

My chest tightened again.

Ignore it.

Focus.

I pulled the first stack free and spread it across the counter.

Kieran shifted beside me, close enough to read over my shoulder, while Maya moved to the other side, already scanning.

Everything looked classified; Lucian must have risked a lot getting these.

Alois lingered just behind us, silent, observant.

I skimmed through the first few pages—data logs, monitoring records, energy fluctuations, patterns I didn't understand.

Then my fingers stilled against the paper.

"No," I whispered.

“What?” Maya asked, leaning closer.

I went back to the beginning of the section and read more slowly.

Subject: Z-01

Designation: Zara

Status: Stabilized—Partial Cognitive Retention Confirmed

My pulse thudded heavily in my ears. I swallowed hard, continuing.

—Observed behavioral responses indicate residual emotional imprinting.

—Bond recognition present under controlled exposure.

—Mate-link resonance detected despite structural reconstruction.

The words seemed to tilt on the page.

“Sera,” Kieran said quietly, tension threading into his voice now. “Talk to me.”

I exhaled slowly, forcing the air out of lungs that suddenly felt too tight.

“They’re not just reviving bodies,” I said.

Maya frowned. “We already knew that.”

“No,” I said, shaking my head, my gaze still locked on the page. “Not like this.”

I turned the document toward them and tapped the relevant lines.

“They’re retaining bonds.”

“That’s...” Maya grabbed the document out of my hand and scanned it. “That’s not possible.”

“It shouldn’t be,” I agreed.

But the proof was right in front of us.

Lucian's Zara—whether a puppet or the real thing—was not just alive, not just functioning.

They were still connected by the bond that should have snapped clean when she died.

My stomach twisted as the implications began to sink in.

"If they can retain emotional imprints..." I said slowly, thinking it through as I spoke, "then they're not just controlling the puppets from the outside."

"They're reinforcing them from within," Alois finished quietly.

I looked up at him, and he met my gaze, his expression unusually grave.

"Using what remains of the original psyche as an anchor," he continued. "It makes the control more stable. More resistant to disruption."

"And more convincing," Maya added.

My fingers tightened against the edge of the paper.

Yes, that too.

Because if the bond felt real, if the connection responded the way it always had, then how would anyone tell the difference?

Worse, mate bonds weren't just emotional; they were instinctual, fundamental.

Even without acknowledging the bond, I knew how hard it had been to resist Kieran.

If something could replicate that—

A cold realization slid down my spine.

"If mate bonds can be sustained,' I said, "then so can familial and pack bonds."

Kieran's posture stiffened beside me. "They could use them to manipulate entire packs."

“If they push this further,” I murmured, my thoughts racing now, slotting into place with terrifying clarity, “if they figure out how to fully stabilize it...”

I didn’t finish the sentence.

I didn’t need to.

Because we all saw it.

A world where the dead didn’t just return, they replaced.

Where loyalty could be manufactured.

Where trust could be weaponized.

Where no bond—no matter how sacred—could be relied on.

“It would break everything,” Maya said softly.

“Yes,” I replied.

My voice was steady now.

Because this—this was something I understood.

This was a problem. A threat.

Something that could be analyzed, dismantled, fought.

I flipped to the next section, scanning faster now, absorbing what I could.

There were notes on failure rates. Instability thresholds. Neural degradation curves.

But interwoven through all of it... Adjustments. Refinements. Progress.

“They’re getting better,” I said.

Alois nodded. “Rapidly.”

“How fast?” Kieran asked.

I skimmed a series of dated entries, my stomach sinking further with each one.

“Too fast,” I answered.

Because the gaps between iterations were shrinking, the improvements compounding.

Whatever Lucian had done to slow them, it hadn't been enough.

I set the papers down carefully, forcing my hands to remain steady.

“Then we don't treat this like what we've been dealing with so far,” Maya said.

“Exactly,” I agreed. “We treat it like a system, one that's evolving.”

Kieran nodded. “We stop reacting to what it is now,” he said. “And start preparing for what it's going to become.”