

My Sister 435

Chapter 435 HORNET'S NEST

SERAPHINA'S POV

Kieran didn't speak on the way back to our room.

I tried to pretend it was nothing.

The meeting had been dense, layered with many moving pieces, many implications that would take time to unravel.

Silence after something like that wasn't unusual. If anything, it was expected.

But this...

This wasn't that.

It wasn't the quiet of someone thinking. It was the quiet of someone holding something back.

I felt it in the space between us as we walked the length of the corridor, in the absence of the small, instinctive touches that had long since become second nature between us.

Normally, even in silence, there was a kind of awareness—his presence brushing against mine, steady and grounding.

Now...there was distance.

And I knew where it had started.

Not in the strategy room.

Not when Alois had mentioned royalty or witch factions or tracking curses or even Lucian.

No—it had started earlier.

Back in the Origins Archives.

The moment he came out of that place, something had shifted in him. Subtle enough that no one else would have noticed. Controlled enough that it could be dismissed as fatigue or distraction.

I had noticed.

But then everything else had happened, and there hadn't been time to stop and ask.

Now there was.

We reached our room in silence.

Kieran stepped inside first. His movements were stiff and controlled as he crossed the space and shed his jacket, tossing it carelessly over the back of a chair.

I closed the door behind us, the soft click echoing loudly.

"Kieran."

He paused, but he didn't turn.

"Yes?"

I studied him for a moment, taking in the tension in his shoulders, the way his hands flexed once at his sides before going still again.

“You’ve been quiet,” I said.

“I’m thinking.”

“I know how you are when you’re thinking. This isn’t that.”

Slowly, he turned. His gaze met mine, steady, deliberately unreadable in a way that would have thrown anyone else.

Not me.

“Tell me,” I said.

His jaw tightened. “There’s nothing to say.”

“That’s not true.”

Silence stretched between us.

I held his gaze, refusing to let it slip, refusing to give him the space to retreat behind whatever wall he was trying to build.

“What was that reaction?” I asked. “When Alois mentioned royalty.”

“There was no reaction.”

“You shut it down faster than a bullet.”

His lips pressed into a thin line. “Like I said—”

“Don’t lie,” I cut him off, my chest tightening. “Not to me.”

His head dropped, and he released a sigh heavy enough to break a camel’s back as he sat on the bed.

I moved from my spot by the door and joined him, close enough that I was pressed into his side. I rested a hand on his thigh and squeezed gently.

“We don’t keep things from each other anymore,” I said softly, “right?”

He lifted his head, his gaze shifting to mine. Something awfully close to vulnerability flashed in his eyes before he masked it.

“I don’t ever want to keep anything from you,” he said quietly.

“Then tell me,” I urged.

His exhale was slow and measured. Like he was deciding something.

Then, finally, he spoke. “I...might know a way.”

“A way to what?” I asked.

“To find them.”

Instantly, I knew what he was referring to.

“Werewolf royalty,” I confirmed.

“Yes.”

I studied him, my mind already moving, connecting the pieces, filling in the gaps he hadn't yet spoken aloud.

“Why didn't you say anything in the meeting?” I asked.

The vulnerability returned in his gaze as he said, “Why do you think?”

I frowned. “What's wrong with this...way?”

His gaze held mine for a moment longer before he looked away again, his hand coming up to drag slowly down his face.

“Because it's not a solution,” he said. “It's a gamble.”

“That applies to everything we're dealing with right now.”

He shook his head. “Not like this.”

Something in his tone shifted—darker, heavier.

“Kieran...what aren’t you saying?”

He let out a quiet breath.

“Royal lines don’t just...fall,” he said. “Not without a reason. Power like that doesn’t just vanish. It gets dismantled. Buried. Sealed. Locked away.”

The way he said it made me pause—not as a fact, but as a warning.

Goosebumps rose across my skin.

“And you think unlocking it comes with...risks?”

Silence.

“Kieran.”

He clenched his teeth so hard I swore I heard a crack.

“There’s always a cost,” he said finally.

“There’s always a cost,” I echoed. “So what is it?”

“I don’t know,” he admitted, dropping his head again.

“You...don’t know,” I repeated.

“No. But you can be sure the price to pay will not be cheap.”

Honestly, I didn’t understand this conversation.

There was definitely more he was holding back, and I couldn’t tell what was weighing on him more—the secret, or keeping it from me.

He sighed. “We can try anyway. If we—”

“No.”

The word slipped out before I’d even realized I moved my lips.

Kieran’s gaze shifted to me. “Sera—”

“No.”

My grip on his thigh tightened, my heart pounding harder as the image flashed in my mind again, hitting so hard it stole my breath.

Ash.

Blood.

Kieran on his knees.

I forced it down.

Forced myself back into the present.

Back to him.

Here. Safe.

“You’re not doing that,” I said, my voice quieter now but no less certain.

His expression shifted, concern furrowing his brows.

“Sera—”

“There are other ways,” I said. “We don’t need to go poking a hornet’s nest.”

“But you—”

“We’re not doing that, Kieran.”

He stopped—because he heard it.

Not just the words, but the conviction behind them. The fear.

I saw the moment he noticed.

The way my hands had curled on his thigh. The way my breathing wasn't quite steady. The way my gaze locked onto his like I was afraid to look away.

"What is it?" he asked, his voice soft.

I shook my head, shifting my gaze. "It's nothing."

He cupped my face, forcing me to keep my eyes on his.

"It's not nothing."

"I said it's nothing."

The lie sat between us, flimsy and transparent.

He didn't call it out, but I could see the awareness settle in his eyes anyway.

“Sera,” he whispered, “if the royal line is the only way—”

“It’s not.”

I didn’t know how true that was, but I needed it to be true.

I couldn’t—wouldn’t—risk a future where that image of him became real.

“I have another way,” I said, forcing the image down, down, down.

His frown deepened. “What way?”

“I can restore Aaron’s memories.”

“How does that lead us to the witches?” he asked.

I held his gaze, willing him to see it, to understand what I was offering.

“What he knows—what he’s connected to—it’s not nothing. If we push that first, we might not need to go down this road at all.”

I didn’t know what the royal line had to do with Kieran in that ash field, but no way in hell was I going to find out.

Long silence followed.

I watched him, my heart still pounding, waiting for him to push back, to argue, to insist—

But he didn’t.

He wrapped an arm around my waist and effortlessly pulled me onto his lap. Tenderly, he tucked a stray strand of hair behind my ear, his fingers resting there.

“You’re sure?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said, leaning into his touch, letting it ground me and keep the scary image away.

Slowly, he nodded.

“Alright.”

Relief hit hard. I closed my eyes, leaning forward, my forehead pressed against his.

“We’ll get through all this,” he murmured, his breath warm against my lips.

I nodded, not trusting myself to speak.

Beneath the relief, the fear still lingered.

Whether I liked it or not, the path he had just revealed was still there.

Waiting.