

## **My Sister 438**

### Chapter 438 THE FIRST STEP

#### SERAPHINA'S POV

The transition was seamless.

There was no disorientation, no jarring shift, no sense of being pulled into something unstable. Not even the chaotic flood of memories I'd experienced last time I was in Celeste's mind.

Instead, it felt as though I had stepped across a threshold into a space that had always existed in perfect order.

Her consciousness unfolded around me with a clarity that caught me off guard.

Everything was structured. Layered. Connected.

Unlike in Aaron's mind, memories didn't drift here; they aligned.

Threads of light ran cleanly between them, forming pathways that pulsed with quiet consistency, each one anchored, each one accessible.

‘Careful,’ Alina murmured, unease sharp in her tone. ‘This is too clean.’

‘I know,’ I replied softly.

She was right. Even without damage, even without interference, no mind was ever this...perfectly arranged.

There were always irregularities. Natural gaps. Shifts in clarity.

Here... There were none.

It was suspicious—even more suspicious than the mess her mind had been last time I was here.

But what choice did I have?

I moved forward anyway.

The outer layers responded immediately, opening without hesitation as I reached for them.

Childhood memories surfaced with startling ease—moments of training, of structured lessons, of carefully curated experiences that flowed seamlessly into the next, almost too precise in their sequencing.

No resistance. No delay. No distortion.

If anything, they welcomed me.

I slowed, narrowing my focus.

This wasn't where the truth lay; this was the surface—polished, curated.

Whatever I was looking for was much, much deeper.

So I dove.

The threads ahead dimmed, not disappearing, but losing some of their clarity, as though a veil had settled over them—thin, nearly imperceptible, but present.

Just like Aaron's mind.

I moved toward them carefully, keeping my power steady, controlled, letting the silver guide rather than force.

The first layer parted easily, and sunlight flooded the space.

The scent of salt and ocean air wrapped around me, the sound of waves lapping softly against the shore grounding the memory in a way that felt almost real.

Celeste stood at the edge of it, her figure turned toward the horizon, the breeze lifting strands of her hair.

Safe.

Beautiful.

Perfect.

I felt it immediately—the constructed nature of it.

Not false—not entirely—but curated. Edited.

I pushed forward, and this time, resistance hit.

The moment I tried to move beyond the surface layer, something pressed back against my awareness.

It was not violent or chaotic. Unlike Aaron's, it was like a barrier designed to redirect rather than destroy.

Alina tensed. 'There it is.'

I exhaled. 'There it is.'

I didn't push immediately.

Instead, I circled it, studying how it responded, how the threads tightened when I approached certain points, how the light dimmed just enough to obscure deeper connections.

This wasn't damage; it was design.

Carefully placed and meticulously maintained.

Catherine's handiwork, no doubt.

I shifted my approach, threading the silver through the existing pathways rather than forcing new ones, aligning with the structure instead of fighting it.

The resistance held.

But it...adjusted.

That told me what I needed to know. It wasn't impenetrable; it was adaptive.

'Alright.' A spark of excitement ignited in my chest. 'Let's see how far you go.'

I pressed again.

The pristine beach fractured at the edges, the sunlight dimming as the memory beneath began to surface.

White walls.

Sterile.

Cold.

The scent of metal cut sharply through the illusion of salt air.

I felt Celeste's presence flicker at the edge of my awareness, her consciousness tightening as if instinctively reacting to the shift.

"Stay with me," I called, my voice soft but firm.

The resistance surged, stronger than anything I had encountered in Aaron's mind.

Each attempt to push deeper triggered a precise counter, redirecting my awareness, dulling the clarity of the memory, fragmenting just enough to obscure what lay beneath without fully breaking the structure.

It was...brilliant. Terrifyingly so.

This wasn't just the work of someone trying to hide something. This was someone who had anticipated exactly this kind of intrusion.

My heart pounded harder.

I shifted again, abandoning the direct approach entirely.

If it resisted force, then I wouldn't force it.

I let the silver spread, thinner now, subtler, slipping between the threads instead of pushing against them, following the smallest inconsistencies, the faintest disruptions in the otherwise perfect structure.

And there—

A crack.

Not in the barrier—in the memory itself.

A flicker. A detail that didn't align.

I focused.

The room sharpened, the sterile environment coming into full clarity—a chair at its center, arcane instrumentation surrounding it, the hum of power threading through the space.

White walls stretched outward, seamless and reflective in a way that felt less like design and more like control.

The air carried an underlying scent: metal, ozone, something faintly medicinal that clung to the edges of every surface.

I didn't look at Celeste—instinct told me not to.

Every time my focus drifted toward her, the memory tried to correct itself, the illusion threatening to snap back into place, smoothing over the cracks I had just slipped through.

So I anchored myself elsewhere, letting my awareness move through the space with careful precision.

The room wasn't just a room.

It was a facility.

The chair at the center wasn't standalone—it was integrated. Subtle lines extended from it, connecting to the surrounding structures like veins feeding into a system built to function as one cohesive whole.

The hum I had noticed earlier wasn't ambient—it was controlled, regulated, sustained.

I moved further, letting the silver thread through the space in fine, controlled strands, brushing against surfaces, tracing outlines, mapping structure instead of forcing access.

Panels. Interfaces.

Both arcane and technological, layered together so seamlessly that the boundary between them blurred into something almost indistinguishable.

No matter how powerful Catherine was—no matter how meticulous, how calculating—she could not have built this alone.

This required infrastructure. Resources. Supply chains.

Not just any kind of flimsy support system.

I stilled, narrowing my focus further, letting the realization guide me instead of rushing ahead.

If this was supplied...

Then there would be traces.

Even in a memory as controlled as this one, even with a barrier designed to redirect and obscure, something would have slipped through.

I shifted my approach again, letting my awareness skim the edges of the room rather than its center, searching not for the obvious but for the overlooked. Details that didn't belong to the curated illusion Catherine preferred.

And then—

There.

A flicker, so small I might have missed it if I had been pushing harder instead of watching.

I focused.

The image resisted at first, blurring at the edges as the barrier reacted, trying to redirect me again, to pull me back toward the safer, cleaner layers of the memory.

I didn't let it.

Instead, I thinned the silver further, slipping between the threads rather than pressing against them, easing my awareness closer without triggering a full defensive response.

The blur sharpened.

A surface—a console, partially obscured.

And on it, a document.

Recently accessed, there long enough to imprint, but not important enough—at least not to Catherine—to be perfectly erased.

My pulse picked up.

“Come on,” I breathed, my focus tightening as I reached for it.

The resistance stirred again, sharper this time.

I was close.

The edges of the memory trembled, the pristine structure beginning to fracture under the strain of my intrusion, light dimming just enough to make the details harder to hold.

I pulled back just enough to let the system settle, then slipped in again at a slightly different angle, catching the fragment before it could fully disappear.

This time, it held.

Lines of text flickered into clarity, incomplete, fragmented, but legible in pieces.

Shipment logs.

Dates.

Codes.

Names—Entities. Suppliers.

My breath caught.

I was right—this operation wasn't hidden in isolation. It was a whole damn network.

The realization hit like a spark catching fire.

If they had suppliers, then they had routes.

If they had routes, then they had vulnerabilities.

Cut the supply.

Disrupt the flow.

And everything Catherine had built, everything she was relying on, would start to collapse.

The moment that understanding locked into place, the system reacted with full force. It pushed back against my awareness with enough force to blur the fragment in front of me.

I held on just long enough to catch one last detail: a symbol stamped beside the shipment codes.

My pulse spiked.

There you are.

Pain lanced through Celeste's consciousness, her body reacting to the strain as the barrier surged in full force.

That was her limit.

I pulled back instantly.

The world rushed back in around me.

The clearing. The night air. The weight of my own body grounding me as my eyes snapped open.

Celeste's breath hitched sharply in front of me, her shoulders tensing as she sucked in air, but she didn't break. She didn't collapse. She held, just as she had promised.

Kieran was already moving, his presence at my side immediate.

“Sera,” he said, his voice low, searching. “Talk to me.”

I pushed myself to my feet, my pulse still racing, adrenaline sharp and electric beneath my skin.

“I got it,” I panted, my voice trembling—both from the strain and excitement.

Kieran frowned, his hands bracing against my elbows. I realized his grip was the only thing keeping me upright.

“Got what?” he asked.

I let out a giddy giggle that sounded almost manic in the still night.

“The first step in taking down their operation.”