

My Sister 440

Chapter 440 A DEMONSTRATION

MARGARET'S POV

The silence had stopped suffocating me.

Nothing about my confinement had improved.

The room was still as barren as ever—the same narrow bed, the same cold stone walls, the same artificial light that refused to tell me whether the world outside was day or night.

And yet...something inside me had.

I sat at the edge of the bed, hands loosely folded in my lap. My gaze rested on the faint scratches etched into the stone floor—marks I didn't remember making, but had likely traced absentmindedly during the early days of my imprisonment.

Back when I had still been reacting. Panicking.

I exhaled slowly, the breath leaving me steady, measured.

That version of me felt distant now.

Because time, no matter how distorted it seemed in this place, had given me something I had not expected: clarity.

When you are stripped of movement, of distraction, of choice—when there is nothing left but your own thoughts—they sharpen whether you want them to or not.

And mine had.

Again and again, I had walked through the past.

Not just the obvious moments—the confrontation with Catherine, the discovery of her betrayal—but the smaller ones.

The overlooked ones.

The ones I had dismissed without question because I trusted her.

A faint, humorless smile touched my lips.

Trust.

How easily we use that word. How casually we offer it.

And how devastating the cost when it is misplaced.

I leaned back, bracing my hands against the thin mattress as I let my gaze drift upward to the ceiling.

There had always been signs. Subtle, easily dismissed signs.

The way Catherine asked questions with a precision that suggested it wasn't merely curiosity.

The way she listened when I spoke about psionic structures, her attention too sharp, too focused for casual interest.

Now, I saw it for what it truly was.

Research.

Experimentation.

On me.

On my daughter.

My jaw tightened as Sera's face rose in my mind—soft at first, then clearer, sharper, layered with years of memories.

Her childhood. Her quiet resilience. The way she had endured more than any child should have, and still found the strength to stand.

The sealing ritual. The moment everything changed.

I had given everything I had to stabilize her. Every thread of my power. Every ounce of strength.

And Catherine had stolen what remained.

A slow breath left me, steadying the flicker of anger that threatened to rise again.

Anger would not help me now. Emotion, in this place, was a liability.

Catherine thrived on it. Manipulated it. Weaponized it.

The faint metallic click of the door unlocking broke through the quiet.

My gaze lifted, my posture straightening with alertness.

The door opened, and Catherine stepped inside.

For the first time since she'd been coming to see me, she wasn't alone.

My attention shifted to the second figure that entered the room.

A young woman.

She moved with a certain controlled grace, her posture straight, her steps measured—as though she had been taught, trained, to carry herself in a specific way.

But that wasn't what caught my attention.

It was her face. Her hair. Her eyes.

For a brief, disorienting moment, my breath caught.

Because she looked—

No.

Not the same. But close enough.

The shape of her features, the line of her jaw, the softness beneath the surface of her expression.

There was something of Sera in her.

Not enough to mistake her, but enough to unsettle something deep within me.

I stood slowly, my gaze fixed on her.

This was not my daughter.

There was no bond. No resonance. No familiar thread that tied us together the way it always had with Sera, even after I had lost my power.

But...

There was something else.

Faint. Indistinct. Like the echo of a connection that had not yet fully formed.

The sensation was subtle enough that I might have dismissed it...if not for the way it stirred something instinctive within me. Protective.

It unsettled me more than I cared to admit.

Catherine's voice cut through the moment. "I thought you might appreciate some company."

Her tone was light. Pleasant. As if she had brought a guest to entertain me.

My gaze shifted to her, my expression settling into a blank canvas.

“I didn’t realize you were in the habit of hosting social visits in your dungeon,” I replied coolly.

Her lips curved. “Only for special occasions.”

The young woman beside her remained silent, but I noticed the way her eyes moved—quick, cautious, taking in the room, the door, me.

There was awareness there. And beneath it—fear.

“What is this?” I asked, keeping my focus on Catherine.

She stepped further into the room, her presence filling the space with that same suffocating composure she always carried.

“This,” she said, gesturing to the girl, “is Zara.”

I let my gaze drift to her again, studying the subtle tension in her shoulders, the way her hands remained still at her sides—not relaxed, but restrained.

“Zara,” I repeated softly.

Her eyes darted toward me at the sound of her name.

Something passed between us—a flicker of recognition that didn't belong.

It vanished as quickly as it came.

I frowned, but before I could examine the sensation further, Catherine spoke again.

“She’s one of my more...promising subjects.”

The word made my stomach tighten.

Zara’s expression didn’t change, but I saw it—the minute shift in her breathing, the tightening of her fingers.

“Is that supposed to impress me?” I asked flatly.

Catherine smiled.

“No,” she said. “It’s supposed to motivate you.”

Before I could respond, Catherine’s hand moved.

She reached out and caught Zara’s chin between her fingers, tilting her face upward with a force that was just shy of gentle.

Zara stiffened, but her hands twitched—just slightly—as if resisting the instinct to pull away.

“Look at her,” Catherine said softly, her voice dropping into something quieter, colder.

My gaze didn’t waver. “I am.”

“Do you see it?” she asked, slanting me a knowing smile.

I didn’t answer.

Because I did see the resemblance to my daughter—and she knew it.

Catherine's smile sharpened. "I thought you might."

Her fingers tightened just enough to draw a faint wince from Zara before releasing her abruptly.

Zara stepped back half a pace, her composure slipping for a fraction of a second before she caught herself.

"Careful," Catherine murmured, not looking at her. "You know how fragile this stability is."

Zara went still, and in that moment, I understood something I had not been meant to.

My eyes narrowed. "Stability," I repeated.

Catherine's gaze flicked toward me, amused. "Yes."

"What happens if it fails?" I asked.

Zara's breath hitched.

Catherine cocked her head. "Why don't we find out?"

Then, without warning, she struck Zara.

The sound cracked through the room, sharp and clean.

Zara's head snapped to the side under the force of it, her body swaying half a step before she caught herself.

A flush bloomed instantly across her cheek, the mark of Catherine's hand rising stark against her skin.

My breath caught, an instinctive scream trapped in my throat.

Zara didn't make a sound.

But I saw it—the flicker of disorientation, the way her lashes lowered briefly as she steadied herself, pulling her composure back into place piece by piece.

“Pathetic,” Catherine said mildly, as though commenting on something trivial. “You're supposed to be stable by now.”

Zara swallowed.

“I am,” she said quietly.

Catherine’s gaze sharpened. “Are you?”

Her hand lifted again, and this time, Zara flinched.

The second blow came faster. Harder.

Zara didn’t have time to brace for it. The impact sent her stumbling back a full step, her shoulder hitting the stone wall with a dull thud.

A soft, involuntary sound escaped her this time—quickly swallowed, but not fast enough to hide.

“Stop!”

The word left me before I could temper it.

Catherine didn’t even look at me.

“Why?” she asked lightly, her attention still fixed on Zara. “This is part of the process.”

“This is cruelty,” I said, my voice colder now.

She cackled. “Oh really?”

Before I could respond, her hand shot forward again—not to strike, but to seize Zara by the arm, fingers digging in with enough force to make the girl wince.

“You see,” Catherine continued, turning her toward me, as if presenting her, “this is what happens when cooperation becomes...inconsistent.”

Zara kept her gaze lowered, but I saw the strain in it, the effort it took to remain still under Catherine’s grip.

“Answer me,” Catherine said suddenly, her voice dropping.

Zara’s head lifted a fraction.

“Yes, Lady Catherine?”

“Are you consistent?”

“Y-yes.”

Catherine’s fingers tightened. “And yet you flinch.”

“I—”

The word had barely formed before Catherine struck her again.

This time, not across the face. A closed fist drove into her midsection with enough force to knock the air from her lungs.

Zara folded, a strangled breath escaping her as her body instinctively reacted, her hands finally lifting—not to fight, but to brace against the pain.

From that vantage point, her face was hidden, and all I could see was pale blonde hair and a lithe, curvy figure.

I could almost believe it was my Sera being hit.

Something in me snapped.

“Enough!”

The word came sharper this time.

Catherine finally looked at me, curiosity in her expression.

“Is it?” she asked.

I held her gaze, every inch of my composure carefully maintained despite the cold fury coiling beneath it.

“You’ve made your point.”

“Have I?” She tilted her head. “I’m not sure I have.”

Her grip on Zara tightened as she forced her upright despite the way she shuddered through the pain.

“Perhaps we should test the limits a little further.”

“I said stop!”

Surprisingly, she stopped, a brow arching as she watched me.

Waiting.

Measuring.

I understood exactly what she was doing. Whether Zara was mine or not, her suffering was impossible to ignore.

“You want something from me,” I said.

Catherine lifted a shoulder in a shrug. “Of course I do.”

“Then stop pretending this is anything else.”

Her eyes gleamed. “And what do you think it is?”

“A demonstration,” I replied evenly. “A warning. A way to make me choose.”

“And will you?”

“Fine,” I said. “I’ll cooperate. That’s what this is all about, isn’t it?”

Zara’s head lifted at that.

Her eyes met mine, and in them, I saw something shift.

Confusion. Relief. And something deeper.

Something that made that strange, inexplicable thread between us tighten.

Catherine’s lips curved as she released her grip on her at last.

Zara staggered back a step, catching herself, her composure already beginning to reassemble despite everything.

“Wise choice,” Catherine said smoothly.

I met her gaze, my expression calm, even as my mind moved ahead, already adjusting, already calculating.

This wasn't surrender.

But it was necessary.

Because I couldn't remain in this room any longer.

Because I needed to see what she was building.

And because—

My eyes flickered once more to Zara, to the mark still blooming across her cheek, to the quiet way she held herself despite the pain.

I knew one thing with absolute certainty.

She didn't know it yet, but whatever Catherine was doing, letting me into it was going to be the biggest mistake she'd ever made.