

My Sister 109

Chapter 109 THE BANE OF MY EXISTENCE

SERAPHINA'S POV

My days off were as rare and precious as hidden gems.

No rigorous training schedule. No sadistic drills threatening to kill me. No psychotic trainer doing her very best to combust my eardrums.

The only downside was that I was so used to movement and action that I spent all of twenty extra minutes in bed before I got too restless and shot to my feet.

I turned the energy on the house. I tackled the sink full of dishes, wiped down the shelves, and even folded the laundry that had grown into a mini mountain, moving from chore to chore until the rooms felt lighter.

By the time I finished, the floors gleamed and the house smelled faintly of lemon cleaner and lavender air freshener.

Still, it wasn't enough. The restlessness lingered, drumming through my veins. My gaze drifted out the window to where the lawn waited, strewn with dry leaves like a silent challenge.

Grabbing the rake, I stepped outside. The late-summer air wrapped around me, thick with the scent of grass and apple pie from someone's open kitchen window.

My neighbor, Mrs. Harlow, waved from her porch, her terrier barking like it had some grand announcement to make.

I rarely conversed with my neighbors, but I'd lent Mrs. Harlow a cup of sugar once, and she'd decided that I was her new best friend.

"Doing some gardening today, dear?" she called.

I smiled, tucking a stray hair behind my ear. "Trying to. Before my front lawn turns into a jungle and swallows me."

She chuckled, then launched into a brief ramble about her grandson starting school this fall.

It was the kind of small, simple conversation that shouldn't have meant much—but for me, it did.

To talk about children and school and weather, to be ordinary and mundane for five minutes, felt almost decadent.

The last of my restless energy was spent at the farmer's market, and by the time I was walking up my driveway with my grocery bags cutting into my palms, I was humming happily under my breath because the best part of today was yet to come.

Lucian was coming over later this evening after some work he had to take care of, and we were going to cook together.

Another seemingly simple thing that made my heart flutter.

I think it was the domesticity of it. Kieran and I had never made toast together, let alone cooked a whole meal.

And the thought of Lucian in my kitchen, sleeves rolled, as we argued over whose recipes tasted better, brought a silly, giddy smile to my face.

But of course, I was Seraphina, and having one entire good day to myself was just completely unfathomable.

My smile dropped as I froze at the base of my porch steps—and beheld the bane of my existence.

Celeste was standing at my doorstep like she owned the house, the late sun painting her hair gold, her posture all effortless grace.

My heart dropped into my stomach, the good mood draining from me like water through a sieve.

I tightened my grip on the grocery bags and took one long, deep breath.

Then I shifted my eyes past her as if she were just a shadow.

Maybe if I ignored her long enough, she'd vanish into thin air.

Oh, a girl could wish.

"Sera." Her hand shot out, grabbing mine before I could turn the key.

Her touch was light, deceptively delicate, like a snake testing the warmth of its prey. "Wait. Please. I didn't come here to fight."

I raised my eyes slowly, careful not to let my expression show anything, letting my silence be answer enough.

"I came to apologize," she said, the words rolling off her tongue with the smoothness of an actor reciting well-rehearsed lines.

I almost laughed. Apologize?

Were we seriously repeating the spa charade again?

Celeste Lockwood didn't apologize. She maneuvered, she twisted, she cut. And she didn't accept fault for anything.

Still, I said nothing, slipping my hand free.

"Mother..."

I momentarily lost my composure and flinched. Celeste caught that and pressed on.

"During dinner the other day, she spoke about you. Longingly. She said she hoped you might come over for dinner sometime. She misses you, Sera. We all do."

'We all do.'

I could handle bitchy Celeste. I could handle bitter, acidic, toxic Celeste.

But when she did this...

When she pretended like she actually had a heart beating behind her rib cage. Like we were actually family who could care about each other...

It stung more than I cared to admit.

Because I knew it was all part of her act. And it made me feel stupid for wishing it wasn't.

"I'm busy," I said curtly, reaching for the door again.

But Celeste, as always, had come armed. From her bag, she pulled out a thick photo album, worn around the edges, its cover frayed by time.

She thrust it toward me like a peace offering. "Mother wanted you to have this. Old pictures. Memories."

I should have stepped in and slammed the door in Celeste's face. But something inside me hesitated—foolishly, I admit.

A part of me, the child I once was, still wanted scraps from my family. Still wanted proof that I'd mattered enough to be preserved in photographs. So I accepted it.

But I'd be damned if I let her into my home.

I set the grocery bags down at my feet and opened the album.

My breath caught.

Every page was Celeste.

Celeste at recitals, Celeste at birthdays, Celeste in gowns, Celeste with flowers, Celeste and—my chest tightened—Kieran. Their smiles preserved forever in glossy print, intimate moments framed for eternity.

Not a trace of me.

My fingers trembled as I turned the pages, my vision blurring the longer I looked for myself. The silence between us thickened until—

There it was. Celeste's endgame.

In the picture, I was fifteen again. Standing at the edge of the packhouse courtyard, eyes burning, face tight and red with humiliation.

Fifteen years later, and I could still hear the whispers that had snaked around me like smoke, the laughter that had rung in my ears like church bells.

The day the truth had spilled—the day everyone learned I had no wolf.

The photographer had captured me at my lowest: wide-eyed, brittle, half-drowned in shame.

Around me, blurred in the background, were the smirks of those who had mocked.

I slammed the album shut.

“Accidentally included, I suppose?” My voice was sharp enough to cut glass.

Celeste feigned innocence, widening her doe eyes. “Of course. I didn’t notice that one. You know I would never—”

“Stop.” My chest heaved. “Was it an accident fifteen years ago, too?”

Her lips parted, the mask slipping for just a fraction of a second.

“Father told us not to tell,” I pressed, words scraping out of me like poisoned daggers.

“He said to keep it within the family until we understood—until we could come up with a solution. But somehow, everyone in the pack knew before I’d even come to terms with it.”

I looked up at her, crimson creeping into my vision. “You told them—under the guise of concern. You asked around if anyone knew how to cure a wolfless werewolf.” I shoved the album at her chest, and she clutched it with one hand.

I sneered. “Worried little Celeste, looking for a cure for her poor wolfless sister.”

The memory burned. I could still see her that night, head bowed, eyes glistening as she confessed to Father that she had been the reason the whole pack knew I didn’t have a wolf.

She pretended that she was only trying to help, that she only revealed my deepest flaw and my family’s most shameful secret because she cared too much.

And Father—he had believed her. Everyone had.

She was sweet, selfless Celeste. And I was useless, broken Sera.

That was the first time in my life that I ever experienced anger so potent that I lost control.

And even now, I remember the chilling satisfaction that ran through me as I shoved Celeste in my anger.

She had fallen and merely scraped her palms. But she'd screamed like I'd taken a saw to her wrist.

And the pack had reacted as though I'd committed some unspeakable crime. That was the first day I felt the sting of my father's palm across my cheek.

From then on, their disgust had a sharper, crueler edge.

More than being a pathetic, wolfless, outcast, I was the crazy bitch who hurt the sister who only ever cared for her.

Celeste blinked at me now, a faint smile playing at the corner of her lips. For a heartbeat, I thought she'd continue the charade.

But she leaned closer, her perfume wrapping around me, her whisper venomous. "Of course I told them. Deliberately. Did you really think I'd let you use your weakness to receive sympathy? No, what you deserved is scorn."

Gods, my sister had never looked uglier than she did in this moment. “Wolfless, pitiful Sera. Born marked by the Moon Goddess herself as tainted. And you can train as hard as you want. You can kick and punch and run, but you will never, ever be more than what you are—”

Her lips curled, teeth bared. “Broken.”

Celeste’s head whipped to the side, hair spilling forward as the crack of my palm against her cheek echoed around us.

For a moment, silence.

Then—she laughed. Low, eerie, chilling. A sound that curdled the air.

“You’re so fucking predictable,” she whispered, eyes gleaming.

She edged around, but kept facing me, and started walking backwards. “That’s why you’ll always be behind.”

Step by step, she backed away, her smile growing into something vicious and primal. “That’s why you’ll never have the life you want.”

She stopped at the end of my driveway and raised her voice. “That’s why I’ll always win.”

I frowned. “Wha—”

She stepped out into the street.

“Celeste, get the fuck out of the—”

“You’re not the only one who can fake a crisis, sweetie.” She winked.

And in one deliberate motion, she let herself fall. Backward.

My scream ripped from my throat as a horn blared. Tires screeched.

Then impact.