

My Sister 126

Chapter 126 PRETTY LITTLE DECORATION

CELESTE'S POV

I had been in a good mood all day.

For once, I wasn't sharing Kieran with a hundred pack members, or having to stand aside while he catered to his nine-year-old brat two thousand miles away.

I hadn't spent one second wasting my energy worrying over Sera's tedious, self-serving schemes.

Tonight was supposed to be ours, just like he'd promised—a private dinner at my favorite restaurant chain, a little wine, and maybe I could actually draw laughter out of him. Maybe I could nurse out traces of the Kieran who had adored me before Sera came into the picture.

And then, when everything went on spectacularly, I would do what I needed to do to secure my place once and for all.

Mark or no mark, nothing tied a man more firmly than a bed. And I was determined to get Kieran into mine tonight.

I had dressed specifically for it, too.

A soft pink dress that skimmed over my hips and hugged my curves delicately, loose curls falling down my back, perfume just strong enough to pervade all his senses.

I smiled softly when he opened the door of the restaurant for me, eyes flicking low, and then gently led me in, his hand at the small of my back.

But fate, as always, is a sick fucking bitch and needs to find another hobby other than throwing me into situations that make me want to claw my skin off.

Because when we walked into that restaurant, the first thing I saw wasn't a candlelit booth waiting for us. It was her.

Sera-fucking-phina.

And worse, Ethan was sitting at her side—his stupid fucking mate beside him—angled toward her in an intimacy that knifed through me instantly.

His hand rested on the table close to hers, his head tilted as if he were actually listening, actually interested in whatever the fuck she had to say.

My smile evaporated.

“What is this?” I snapped before I could stop myself. My voice carried, too sharp, too loud.

Kieran’s hand brushed my elbow, and his voice was a low, warning murmur, “Let it go, Celeste. Maybe we should leave—”

But I shook him off, marching right across the restaurant to their booth. “Ethan, what the fuck?”

Surprise briefly flickered across his face before his expression cooled.

“What on earth are you doing here?” I glared at Sera, hatred rising in me like a tide of lava. “With her.”

He couldn’t pretend he didn’t know there was a battle line drawn between me and our sister, and he was acting as if he’d picked her side.

Ethan didn’t even flinch. An infuriating calmness was painted across his face, as though my outrage was nothing but background noise.

Before he could answer, another voice cut in—light, barbed, and amused.

Maya.

“Maybe the better question is what you’re doing here, Celeste,” she said, leaning back in her seat, one brow arched. “From where I’m sitting, it looks like you barged in uninvited.”

Heat scorched my cheeks. I wanted to lash out, but something in the way she looked at me—so dismissive, so certain I didn’t matter—made the words stick in my throat.

Kieran, suddenly a fucking diplomat, stepped forward. “Hello, everyone.” His eyes briefly skimmed the table, and I know I didn’t imagine the extra second they spent on Sera. “I apologize for the...intrusion.”

He turned to me and ducked his head, saying smoothly, “Let’s move to a booth. We’ll give them their table, enjoy some privacy—”

“No,” I cut in quickly and lifted my chin, declaring, “We’ll join them.”

The table went silent for a beat. Ethan’s jaw flexed. Maya’s face puckered like I’d just suggested she dine with rats.

Kieran’s gaze flicked toward Sera, tense, as if awaiting her refusal.

But she didn’t refuse.

Instead, Sera lifted her glass, eyes cool as winter, and said lightly, “Of course.” She gestured at the open space in front of her. “There’s plenty of room.”

I blinked, momentarily thrown. I had expected her to bristle, to guard her precious little circle. But no. She said yes. She welcomed me.

It had to be a provocation. A challenge. A new game she was playing.

The way her lips curved at the corner, the way Ethan didn’t even shift aside to make room but stayed close, as though forming a protective shield in front of her—it all screamed at me.

Fine. If that’s how she wanted to play it.

I sat down opposite her, and after a heartbeat of hesitation, Kieran slid in next to me. We formed a circle—Maya, Sera, Ethan, Kieran, and me.

I smoothed my dress and immediately turned my attention to Maya.

After all, Ethan wouldn’t be at this table if not for her. The way I saw it, Maya Cartridge, for some unfathomable reason, cared about Sera, and Ethan was most likely indulging our sister for his mate’s benefit.

So if I could worm my way into Maya’s good graces, maybe Ethan would follow and get back on my side.

“So, Maya,” I began with a smile I knew was radiant, “I hear you’ve been doing good work with Sera. You must have such patience to teach her.”

Maya didn’t even bother to lift her gaze from her plate. “Not nearly enough as is required to deal with you,” she muttered.

The insult hit like a slap. My fingers clenched in my lap.

I tried again, pitching my tone sweeter. “Still, it must be rewarding. Guiding someone less experienced, helping them grow—it speaks to your generosity.”

Maya’s eyes snapped up then, sharp as daggers. “Don’t flatter me, Celeste. I have no generosity or patience when it comes to you.”

The table stilled. Sera’s lips twitched, as though she fought back laughter. Ethan coughed lightly into his fist.

And Kieran—Kieran wasn’t even paying attention to the conversation. He wasn’t the slightest bit peeved at the insult I just suffered.

He was watching Sera. Not me. Not the dress I’d chosen, not the curls I’d spent hours perfecting. Her.

And as the waiter came over to take our orders, as dinner actually began, I looked back on my brilliant decision to join their table and mentally gave myself the middle finger.

Ethan, Sera, and Maya were engaged in lively conversation, their voices threading together in a rhythm that excluded the rest of us.

Ethan leaned in slightly, his expression softened in a way I hadn't seen in years—listening, truly listening—as though every word Sera offered was worth tucking away.

She gestured with her hands, her tone animated, and he laughed, low and genuine, a sound that should have belonged to family dinners or nights around the fire but had somehow become hers.

And Kieran...gods, he was still watching.

His elbow rested casually on the table, but his eyes—dark, attentive—followed the flick of Sera's wrist, the tilt of her head, the glow in her cheeks when she smiled.

I sat across from them, invisible, my carefully rehearsed charm unraveling all around me. Every note of their laughter pressed into my skin like needles.

I clenched my glass tighter. It should have been me dazzling the table, me catching Kieran's eye, me coaxing warmth from Ethan instead of that stony indifference he'd begun to reserve for me.

Instead, I was left watching from the margins, the air tightening with every passing second, until it felt like I might choke.

Something cracked inside me.

I shifted forward, desperate, my gaze pinning Sera. "Switch seats with me," I said. "I want to sit next to Ethan."

If I couldn't form a psychological wedge between them, I'd have to settle for a physical one.

My request silenced everyone for a moment. Ethan turned his head toward me slowly, his eyes narrowing in quiet disdain that shocked me to my bones.

Before he could speak, Maya leaned in, smirking. "Oh, don't be pathetic, Celeste. Just sit there like a pretty little decoration while the adults discuss, okay?"

My breath caught. My skin fucking burned.

I shoved back my chair and stood abruptly, my heels clattering against the floor. "I won't sit here and be mocked," I spat. "I won't—"

As I spun, my shoulder clipped a passing server, and the tray in her hands wobbled.

It happened so fast, I didn't have a chance of getting out of the way. The glass tipped, and juice cascaded down the front of my dress in a cold, humiliating splash.

Gasps rose from nearby tables. The citrus sting filled my nose. I froze, staring at the sticky ruin spreading across the pink silk.

The rage that had been simmering all night exploded.

Without thinking, I slapped the server across the face. The crack of it echoed through the restaurant. The tray rattled to the floor, a glass rolling harmlessly beneath another table.

"Watch where you're going!" I hissed. "Do you have any idea what you've done? This dress—"

"What the hell, Celeste?" Ethan's voice cut through the noise.

I swirled back to the table, glaring at my brother. All eyes in the restaurant were on me, a hundred unwavering stares.

But the only looks that mattered were Ethan's displeased scowl and Kieran's deep, disapproving frown.

“Excuse me?” I hissed.

“The juice was cold. The glass didn’t even break. You’re not injured, Celeste.”

“That’s not the point!” I snapped, my breath coming too fast.

I spun back to the server, glowering. “She humiliated me. I demand an apology—and compensation for the damage she’s caused.”

The server, trembling, bowed her head, whispering, “I’m sorry, miss—”

But another voice cut across, stern and commanding. “Don’t you dare, Ana.”

The owner of the voice appeared from the kitchen, his apron dusted with flour. His eyes were as hard as steel as they pinned me.

“My employee made an honest mistake,” he said as he stood between me and the server, towering over me. “You were entitled to an apology and compensation,”—his eyes narrowed—“but then you struck her. If anyone deserves an apology, it is she.”

My jaw dropped. “You can’t be serious—”

“Quite serious,” he said, folding his arms. “You will apologize, or you will leave. And if you leave, you will never set foot in any of my establishments again.”

The hush that fell was deafening.

I could feel Sera’s eyes on me, cool and relentless. I could feel Ethan’s disdain, Maya’s smug amusement, Kieran’s disappointment.

Not a single one rushed to my aid or defense.

My entire chest tightened, my lungs refusing to expand.

Me. Apologize? To a servant? In front of all these people?

No. Never.

But the owner didn’t waver. Neither did the stares.

For the first time in my life, I realized there was absolutely no one on my side.

