

## **My Sister 140**

Chapter 140 LONGING AND DISCOMFORT

SERAPHINA'S POV

Of all the people to run into this early—in OTS of all places—I would have wagered on literally anyone else.

But no. Fate—or cruelty—had deemed it fit to plant Kieran Blackthorne right in front of me.

The cavernous cafeteria seemed to shrink around us, voices fading to muffled static, dishes clattering like a far-off storm.

He didn't move. He didn't speak. Just...watched me.

And fuck, I burned under his gaze.

Or maybe it was from the way his hands lingered—one still curled around my arm, the other braced firmly at my waist from when he caught me.

His grip tightened—not painful, but firm enough that my pulse jumped beneath his touch. Almost possessive. As if letting me go wasn't an option.

His hands were warm. Steady. The longer they stayed on me, the more acutely aware I became of every inch of contact.

Then, as if suddenly realizing how tightly he held me, he released me.

Too quickly.

I nearly stumbled back, losing the precarious balance he had given me.

My skin tingled where his hands had been, phantom heat rushing in to fill the abrupt chill of his absence.

“Sorry, I—” I clamped my mouth shut instantly. I didn’t know who owned the raspy, shaky mess of a voice that had come out of my lips, but it sure as hell wasn’t me.

The corner of his lips twitched in what I would have called amusement if the look in his eyes wasn’t so fucking intense.

His gaze pinned me, the air between us so charged that the whole OTS was in danger of exploding at the slightest spark.

My pulse drummed painfully in my ears. And even though I didn't trust my voice, every instinct screamed at me to demand answers.

A dozen questions tangled in my mind, weighing down my tongue. But it all boiled down to one—what the fuck was he doing here?

But what right did I have to ask that question?

Boundaries.

I was the one who'd asked for that; I was the one constantly sick of him prying into my business.

What he did and where he frequented should not—did not—matter to me.

So no words escaped my parted lips, and we just...stood there, locked in a silence that vibrated with all the things neither of us could voice.

Then he took a deep, shuddering breath, and for a split second, I thought he might break the silence.

Part of me braced for it—the clash, the inevitable storm that always raged when we were together.

But he stayed mute, his hands curling into tight fists at his side as his eyes bore into mine, scorching, searching, as if they were trying to force words out of me, pull me into a conversation I refused to start.

“Sera!”

I jolted like I’d been struck by lightning.

I blinked, the air rushing back into my lungs all at once as whatever spell had been woven between me and Kieran shattered.

Judy’s cheerful voice rang out, startling in its brightness.

She stood at the entrance, waving one arm high above her head excitedly.

“Um—” My gaze darted back to Kieran’s. “I should—”

Without a word, he stepped aside, inclining his head slightly.

I nodded once, the motion jerky and awkward as I forced myself forward, only stiffening slightly when my shoulder lightly brushed the front of his shirt.

Each step was deliberate, measured, while my insides burned with the effort it took not to look back.

The scent of coffee and Kieran lingered, heavy, clinging to me as the doors loomed closer.

“Yes! You’re here!”

Judy beamed as I approached her. Her hair was pulled back into a messy bun; her uniform had been traded for a comfortable sweater and jeans.

She giggled as she slipped her arm through mine.

“I’m so glad you’re around.”

I smiled at her, forcing back the shadow of my encounter with Kieran. I was grateful that she didn’t ask why I’d been standing in the middle of the cafeteria staring at my ex-husband for goddess knows how long.

“What’s up?”

She tugged me gently. “Come on. You’re coming home with me.”

I blinked. “Home?”

She nodded. “My family is around for the LSTs, and I’m spending the day with them.” She began to pull me along before I could protest. “And now you are too. My sisters will never forgive me if I don’t bring you along.”

I didn’t want to intrude on her family moment, but the prospect of spending my off day alone—where I would either spend it missing my friends or scrutinizing the run-in with Kieran—was not an appealing one.

So I let my smile widen and let Judy pull me along with her.

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Her family had rented a modest house on the edge of the neutral zone, just a short walk from the OTS headquarters.

From the outside, it looked unremarkable—white siding, flowerpots on the porch—but the moment Judy pushed open the door, warmth and noise spilled out like a tidal wave.

“Judy!” squealed a small voice before a boy no taller than my waist launched himself into her arms.

She caught him easily, spinning him in a circle while three more children barreled into the entryway.

Behind them came two women—her sisters, I realized at once. They shared Judy’s lively eyes and infectious smile, though one wore hers more softly, the other more broadly.

“Seraphina, wow,” one of them said, brushing a strand of hair back as she stepped forward. “We’ve heard a lot about you. We’re huge fans.”

The words tugged at my stomach. Fans? Huge??

Before I could respond, an older woman who had to be Judy’s mother appeared from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a flour-dusted apron.

Mrs. Barnes was taller than I expected, her presence solid and radiant, like a hearth fire. She enveloped my hand in both of hers.

“Thank you,” she said simply. “For looking out for my Judy.”

I almost stumbled on my response. “She doesn’t need looking after.” I smiled at Judy, remembering how fiercely she stood up to Brynjar and Roxy. “If anything, she looks out for me.”

Mrs. Barnes chuckled, her eyes softening. “Still. I can see she values your friendship. That’s enough.”

And then I was swept inside.

The house was alive in a way I had forgotten homes could be.

Children's laughter spilled from every corner, the aroma of baking pies and roasted meat filled the air.

The sisters moved around each other with an ease that came from years of living together, their conversation overlapping without ever missing a beat.

They treated Judy like a hero, each story she shared from the Trials and her time in OTS sparking gasps, laughter, or proud nods.

Her nieces and nephews crowded around, tugging at her sleeves, begging her to recount the moment she'd landed a decisive strike against another competitor.

Listening made me so happy, especially knowing Judy had joined in the first place to give her family a better standing in their pack.

At some point, I found myself on the couch with two of the smaller ones pressed against my side, their wide eyes fixed on me.



“Is it true you beat the mist?” the little girl whispered reverently, like she was referring to some ancient artifact.

I blinked. “The mist?”

“The fog,” Judy supplied from across the room, laughing as she held another niece upside down by the ankles, “in the Misty Woods.”

I smiled faintly. “Yes. But I didn’t do it alone. We worked together.”

The children’s awe didn’t dim, though, and one of them declared, “You’re like a real Luna!”

I laughed, but the words cut deeper than I expected, happiness outpaced by a sudden pang, emptiness welling up underneath the surface of my smile.

Later, Mrs. Barnes insisted I sit at the kitchen table while she prepared something she called her good luck pie.

“It’s tradition,” she explained, rolling the dough with decisive movements. “I bake one before every big challenge. It’s kept our family safe this long. Now it’ll keep you safe, too.”

I shook my head, my cheeks warming. “I couldn’t possibly—”

“You can and you will.” Her tone brooked no argument. “Judy isn’t the only one I’m rooting for anymore.”

The lump in my throat was sudden as a mix of longing and discomfort struck me all at once.

I wasn’t used to mothers like this—warm, proud, unquestioning in their acceptance.

I didn’t know where to put the feeling it stirred.

And oh, gods, the longing. It was actually painful, the knowledge that I didn’t have a family as warm and bright and happy as Judy’s. Siblings who adored me. A mother who doted on me.

What did that woman in the forest say? ‘There is no loss greater than that which you barely had.’

When the pie came out of the oven, golden and steaming, the entire family cheered as if it were some great victory. Mrs. Barnes sliced it generously, pressing the first plate into my hands.

It was sweet, tart, rich—comfort baked into a crust.

“Take some with you,” she said later, packing not only the pie but an entire collection of baked goods into bags I tried, and failed, to refuse. “Food is love. And we have plenty to give.”

By the time I left, my arms were full, my chest lightened by something I hadn’t expected to feel today—belonging, even if borrowed.

That feeling lasted until I reached my own doorstep, and there she was.

My own mother.

And just like that—in a pattern that was becoming as familiar as breathing—the warmth I had carried all the way home chilled, brittle as ice.