

My Sister 158

Chapter 158 JOYOUS CHAOS

SERAPHINA'S POV

Finally, blessedly, the press conference came to an end.

We were ushered next to the family waiting area, where laughter and tears collided in a symphony of joy.

The space itself had been softened from the sharp grandeur of the hall. Warm lantern-light pooled in golden circles across the polished floor. Plush couches ringed the chamber, and fragrant sprays of lilies and winter roses lined the walls.

The air buzzed with relief and triumph, scented with salt of sweat and tears and the sweetness of flowers.

Finn's parents nearly bowled him over the moment we crossed the threshold.

His father, a tall man with the same wiry frame and broad shoulders as his son, clapped him on the back so hard I thought Finn might crack a rib.

"That's my boy!" he boomed, voice echoing. His mother swatted at him, tearfully scolding, "Not so hard, Harold, he's bruised already!"

But her arms wound around Finn with crushing strength anyway, her head barely skimming his chin.

Talia collapsed into the arms of a young man, who'd been waiting right at the front. He was tall and stocky with wild blond hair that looked like he'd been pulling at it.

He caught her like he'd been waiting there all day for this moment, hugging her as though he might never let go.

She sobbed openly, the kind of deep, unguarded sob that had no shame in it, while he whispered into her hair. I caught pieces—"I knew you'd make it, baby, I knew"—and my chest tightened.

Judy's boisterous family enveloped her in seconds.

Her mother pressed a trembling kiss to her forehead, pride etched firmly on her face. "My baby." Her voice wavered as she cupped her daughter's cheeks. Her eyes darted over her face and body, as if memorizing every scar and bruise she'd earned in the trials. "I'm so proud I could burst."

Their tender moment was interrupted when Judy's sisters and her swarm of nieces and nephews almost sent her to the ground.

Even Roxy—whom I'd imagined growing up alone in a cave—was smothered by a gaggle of brothers. There were four of them, each with the same jet black hair and sharp eyes.

They lifted her clean off the floor, cheering so loudly I was sure half of the West Coast heard. “Roxanne! You beast! You did it!” one of them bellowed, spinning her in a dizzying circle.

She shrieked and swatted at them, but the laughter breaking out of her cracked voice was pure exhilaration.

I stood back, watching them all. A pang tightened in my chest.

This was what victory was supposed to look like. Family. Arms to fall into. Faces glowing with pride and joy.

And me? I had none of that.

My parents weren't here. Celeste (not that I would ever consider her family to begin with)—well, gods knew what she was doing, probably plotting how to spin her loss into some twisted form of martyrdom.

I had Lucian, yes. Maya too. Ethan...maybe.

But none of them were in sight. I didn't even know if the no-contact ban had been lifted or not.

And in this moment, surrounded by the warm chaos of reunion, I felt the hollow absence of my own family more acutely than ever.

“Seraphina Blackthorne, you absolute fucking legend!”

A delighted gasp tore out of me as I spun—and was immediately swept off my feet.

“Maya!” My laughter bubbled out of me as the room spun around me, Maya’s arms tight around my waist.

I swayed a little when she set me on my feet. “Hi,” I giggled.

“Hi?” She threw her head back, and her laughter was like a champagne bottle popping open in my chest.

Her curls were wild and free around her face, and she wore what looked like ceremonial training gear—a polished leather jacket that bore OTS crests, and a fitted black skirt with combat boots.

The sight of her was like...like a high. Like an addict’s first hit after abstaining so long.

“I missed you so much!” My voice was thick, and the words came out choked.

She was grinning so hard I wondered if it hurt. “I didn’t miss you for one second!” she declared. “I watched every move you made like a hawk. Fuck, Sera! You dominated!”

I pulled her back to me, wrapping her in a hug that was both fierce and vulnerable. “It’s all thanks to you,” I mumbled against her jacket, inhaling her familiar scent. “I would have never made it without your training.”

Her arms tightened hard enough to aggravate my injuries, but I didn’t care. “Don’t you dare give me an ounce of credit,” she said, her voice thickening with emotion. “This was all you, you absolute badass.”

When we pulled back, I had to wipe the tears that were sliding down my cheeks.

“Hey, I’d like to think we helped at least a little.”

Maya turned her head, and her eyes narrowed, though her lips twitched. “Roxanne.” Something like challenge and...respect gleamed in her eyes. “When the Trials first started, I was sure I wanted to gut you open with my favorite knife, but now I think I might want to hug you.”

Roxy beamed, not a trace of sarcasm or snark to be seen. In fact, she looked a little...giddy, as if she were standing before her favorite celebrity.

Before Maya could make good on her promise—or threat—of hugging Roxy, her brothers—still loud, still half-drunk on joy—approached us like a pack of wolves cornering prey.

“So you’re the one,” the tallest said, folding his arms. His grin was all sharp teeth, but his eyes were warm as they scanned me. “The one who tamed our hellhound of a sister.”

Roxy shoved him, snarling. “I’m not a wild animal, idiot. I don’t need to be tamed.”

“Sure, sure,” another brother said breezily, throwing his arm around her shoulder. He turned to me, expression earnest. “She’ll die before admitting it, but we know she wouldn’t have made it without you.”

I opened my mouth to protest, but Roxy’s face went bright red. She punched her brother so hard he doubled over with a groan. “Shut up, Leo!”

The rest of them roared with laughter. One slung an arm around me, startling me. “Well, whether she admits it or not, you’re family now. Anyone who has her back like that—especially when she’s being a bitch—is blood.”

Before I could react, Finn swooped in, dragging his parents with him.

“Mom, Dad—this is Seraphina.” His voice held something almost reverent, as if he were introducing them to royalty. “She’s the reason we’re standing here with gold around our necks.”

I flushed instantly. “That’s not true, Finn—”

His mother cut me off with a ferocious grip on my hands. Roxy's brother's arms disappeared from my shoulders. "Oh, don't you dare downplay it," she said, eyes bright and glistening.

She was a slight woman, but her grip was firm. Her expression was nothing short of fierce pride. "My son has always had amazing potential, but you—you gave him direction. You brought out the best in him."

I shook my head. "We would never have passed the second round without him. Please don't give me all the credit."

"Regardless, I'm going to name my next batch of sourdough starter after you."

I choked on a laugh. Finn's father only grinned, clapping me lightly on the shoulder with his calloused hand.

"You did good, lass, thank you."

Before I could catch my breath, Talia appeared, the young man at her side. He was half-clutching her like she might slip away. His grip only loosened when he turned to me.

"Sera?" His voice was rough, still thick with emotion. "Thank you so much for pulling her through all this."

I hesitated, suddenly shy under his piercing blue gaze. "I just...we all helped each other."

“No,” he said firmly, stepping closer. He was taller than I expected, broad and solid.

“Talía told me what you did. I saw it with my own eyes. You put yourself in the path of danger to save her. You didn’t treat her as less than.” His throat worked, and his voice broke on the last words. “You have no idea what that means to me.”

Warmth filled my chest. “She’s stronger than she knows,” I said softly, smiling at Talía, who was wiping at her tear-streaked cheeks.

“Yeah,” he said, placing a firm kiss on her temple. “And you’re the one who helped her see it.”

Talía flushed crimson as she burrowed into him like she wanted to disappear into his clothes.

I barely had time to brace before Judy’s entire family descended like a tidal wave.

Her nieces and nephews swarmed around me with bright eyes, tugging at my sleeves and babbling all at once.

“Did you really fight a bear?”

“No, it was a wolf!”

“No, it was a wolf and a bear.”

“No, dummy. She fought the bear and rode the wolf!”

I could barely breathe for laughing, answering them as best I could, until Judy’s mother appeared.

She pulled me in with a crushing hug that I returned with my whole heart. “Thank you,” she whispered, her voice wavering. “You’re my daughter now, too. No arguments.”

My vision blurred instantly. “I—thank you,” I stammered, my throat thick.

Judy threw an arm around both of us, her voice suspiciously gruff. “Well, there you go, Sera. You’re stuck with us now. Good luck surviving Sunday dinners.”

The swarm of children shrieked in delight, already chanting, “Aunt Sera! Aunt Sera!”

I laughed until my ribs ached, my cheeks hot from the affection as each of her sisters hugged me one by one.

I was overwhelmed—in the best possible way. Family. Blood. I'd been moping about the absence of my family, and now, here I was saddled with more family than I knew what to do with.

Maya leaned in, her teasing voice cutting through the haze of affection and warmth. "Look at you. You're collecting families like they're trading cards."

I swatted at her, laughing through the sudden sting in my eyes. I leaned into her shoulder, exhaustion and exhilaration tangling inside me.

For a breath, I let myself rest in the simple comfort of her presence amidst the joyous chaos.

"Well,"—she pulled away gently, her eyes twinkling—"I hope you have room for one more."

My brows knit. "What do you mean?"

She smirked. And then—

"Mom!"

The word cracked through the air like a lightning bolt, audible above the almost deafening chatter around.

I froze.

That voice. That small, high, beloved voice.

My head whipped toward the entrance, my heart slamming against my ribs.

And there he was—clutching a bouquet of carnations, a bright grin on his beautiful, beautiful face.

Daniel.