

## **My Sister 161**

Chapter 161 OLIVE BRANCH

KIERAN'S POV

Quite frankly, it was embarrassing how long it had taken me to see Celeste's performances for what they were.

Now, watching her knot her pale hands, lashes wet as artful tears rolled down, it was clear as day.

She wanted me to step forward, to hush the whispers surging around us, to take her in my arms and apologize for all the hurt and heartache she'd gone through.

Once, I might have done it—let my affection for her blind me to her wiles and schemes.

But not tonight. Not after she so harshly and publicly accused me of rigging the Trials in Sera's favor.

The bruise to my pride throbbed, fresh and raw. Celeste hadn't just questioned my judgment—she had ripped my authority as Alpha apart, right in front of my pack, the world, my own son.

If it had been anyone else who'd challenged me like that, they would have been ripped to pieces at my feet.

I wanted to think it was affection that held me back. But in truth, it was pity; I couldn't stop remembering her groveling in the Arena, begging Ashar to give her the talisman without a fight—and she had the nerve to claim I ceded victory to Sera.

And so I stood there, my silence stretching, my hands tightening into fists at my sides. That was all I could give her now—because if I spoke the words on my mind, we would both regret it.

“We’re all going to Mom’s celebration party,” Daniel’s small voice carried through the crowd. “Why don’t you come too, Aunt Celeste?”

I glanced down at my son in shock.

I hadn’t noticed him push himself forward, but now he stood before me—chin lifted, hair in his eyes, calm in a way that struck me with pride.

For the first time, he had used that title—Aunt Celeste. It was neither affectionate nor warm. Polite. A gesture of grace and maturity that caught me off guard.

For one tense moment, I thought it might work. That Celeste would see the olive branch for what it was and accept it.

But Celeste’s lips curled. “Fuck no,” she said, her tone sharp, final. “I’d rather die than join you all to celebrate a fraud.”

The tension in my jaw tightened to breaking point.

I heard Sera's sharp intake of breath. Bless his heart, Daniel's composure did not waver, but his eyes flickered once toward me.

I squeezed his shoulder gently. I was so immensely proud of him. It was no secret that he didn't like Celeste, but he'd put his personal feelings aside to be kind to her, and somehow, she'd managed to be more childish than the nine-year-old.

"Come, love," Sera's voice cut through the dark cloud Celeste had cast like a rainbow. She wrapped a protective hand around Daniel's shoulder. "That's enough excitement for one day."

My fingers twitched with the urge to reach out and pull them both back to my side. But I let them go, my gaze fixed ahead.

"You should rest, Celeste," I said flatly, my tolerance at its end.

I glanced at my best friend, whose patience looked like it was dangling from the same precarious thread mine was.

"Ethan, please see her home."

Celeste stiffened, her mouth parting.

Her tears stuttered—just for a heartbeat—then tumbled harder as she gave her all to the performance.

I turned away without another word and left all the theatrics and games behind.

\*\*\*

CELESTE'S POV

The words struck me like ice water to the face.

'Ethan, please see her home.'

I hadn't meant it. Gods above, I hadn't meant it.

Kieran was supposed to see through my refusal, to know I was only bluffing. I just wanted him to push a little, to show me that I was more important than his son and his ex-wife's stupid fucking victory celebration.

But instead, his eyes were like stone. No warmth. No indulgence. Just cruel dismissal.

Panic rose in me like a tidal wave as he turned away, heading for the rear exit.

I turned sharply to Ethan, searching for rescue. “Ethan,” I whispered. The tears that trembled down my cheeks this time were authentic. “You won’t let him treat me like this, will you? You’ll remind him who I am. You’ll remind him that my place is by his side.”

Ethan’s gaze, steady and cool, did not soften. “Kieran was right. You need rest, Celeste. You’ve been through enough for one night.”

I gasped. “Ethan—”

“I’m attending Sera’s party with Maya, so I’ll arrange for someone to take you to Mother. She’ll know how to care for you.”

“No!” The word burst from me, too loud, too sharp, drawing more of those cursed eyes upon me.

Heat flooded my face, and I lowered my voice quickly, fumbling to reclaim the image of fragility. “I mean...I don’t want to trouble Mother tonight.”

Ethan only sighed. “It isn’t trouble. She’ll be glad to have you home.”

Home. The word cut deeper than he knew. The Lockwood Manor was no sanctuary—it was a prison of expectations, of reminders that I was to be flawless, admired, envied, and I couldn't afford to be anything else.

But I saw in Ethan's expression that it was already decided.

And Kieran. Kieran did not even look back at me.

I wanted to scream. I wanted to claw the smug looks from every face that stared at me, that compared me unfavorably to her. To Sera. Always fucking Sera.

If only I had said yes. If only I had smiled at Daniel, taken the title "Aunt" with grace. I could be walking by Kieran's side right this moment.

I could have veiled my disdain and attended the celebration by his side, all the while reminding him that I was his true equal. The only one fit to be his Luna.

But the moment had slipped.

And I was left with nothing but the cold certainty that I had misplayed my hand.

\*\*\*

#### SERAPHINA'S POV

Trust Celeste and Kieran to find a way to eclipse my moment with their usual drama.

Before, I would have been pissed. Annoyed. Maybe even amused when she started to whimper and produce faux tears, and Kieran didn't so much as bat an eye. Definitely triumphant that I'd bested her in the Trials.

But now, watching my so-called sister collapse into sobs, clutching at the remnants of her dignity, I felt...nothing.

The only thing that mattered to me was Daniel.

I turned away from the spectacle to face my baby, my heart swelling all at once with love and pride.

His invitation had been so pure, so free of malice. Although I didn't want Celeste within a thousand feet of my party, I would have welcomed her with open arms for Daniel's sake.

But she shattered his peace offering without hesitation.

As if I needed yet another reason to keep my son away from the she-devil.

“That was really mature and generous of you, baby,” I told Daniel, brushing his hair out of his eyes. “I’m so proud of you.”

Gods, I still couldn’t believe he was here. It felt like if I didn’t have my hands on him at all times, he would disappear like a mirage.

Daniel squared his shoulders and lifted his chin, his young voice preternaturally firm as he spoke.

“Grandpa Christian always told me that a true Alpha doesn’t let others’ moods sway him,” he began, his words carrying a sage clarity that made my heart clench. “He said emotions are bad leaders but good followers, and even if he doesn’t like someone, he shows them basic courtesy. Because the Alpha is not only himself—he is the example the pack follows.”

His words—so measured, so thoughtful—pierced me. He was still a child, yet he carried himself with a composure that rivaled grown Alphas.

Pride—and something like grief collided within me.

I was so impressed by the young man my son was growing into. But I couldn’t help but wonder if he wasn’t learning all these lessons too soon. Like his birthright as an Alpha’s heir meant he was missing out on the chance to be a carefree child.



Daniel went on, his small hand warm in mine. "I don't like her, Mom. But she is still Grandpa Edward's and Grandma Margaret's daughter. So for their sake, I'll treat her with respect."

He glanced back and rolled his eyes at the sight of Celeste clinging to Ethan's sleeve, sobbing. "Even if she doesn't deserve it."

I blinked away the tears that pricked at the corners of my eyes, my throat aching.

"You make me so proud, Daniel," I whispered, too soft for anyone else to hear. "More than you'll ever know."

He squeezed my hand. "Come on, Mom. Tonight is about you. Let's go."

"Yeah," I sniffed. "Let's."

We walked together toward the front exit of the OTS main building. Behind us, Celeste's sobs lingered, but I did not turn. I had no more energy to waste on her tantrums.

As the doors opened, cool night air rushed over us, and I took in a long, grateful breath.

This had probably been the longest day of my life. I'd woken up in a frozen cave, fought nearly to the death against a veritable beast (aka my ex-husband), won the Trials, got dragged—yet again—into the chaos of my sister and said ex-husband's drama, and was now ending it all with the quiet, grounding warmth of my son's hand in mine.

And then—two figures stepped from the shadows of waiting cars.

Lucian, all charm and smooth confidence, offered me a smile that shone in his beautiful blue eyes. His sleek red car gleamed behind him, the passenger door already open as though prepared in advance.

At his side, Kieran stood, less polished but infinitely steadier, his dark gaze fixed on me with enough intensity to melt steel. His Escalade sat idling nearby, its interior faintly lit.

Both men extended their hands at the same time, and my breath caught.

"Sera," Lucian said smoothly, inclining his head. "Daniel. Allow me."

"That's okay," Kieran's voice, quieter but firm, followed. "They can come with me."