

My Sister 174

Chapter 174 CONGRATULATIONS? CONDOLENCES?

SERAPHINA'S POV

The sight of Kieran hit me like a punch to the gut, twisting my insides with a nauseating churn.

He stood by his car, arms crossed, the chilled wind teasing his dark hair into disarray. That familiar brooding expression was painted across his face.

For a second, I couldn't move. I just gripped the steering wheel tighter like it was the last shred of my sanity.

Of course he was here.

My first thought was bitter and instinctive: He came to defend her again.

Maybe Celeste had already run crying to him, spinning some tragic story about me attacking her in front of her "stepson."

And he'd come to tell me off—right here, in front of Daniel—because heaven forbid Saint Celeste ever be at fault.

“Mom?” Daniel’s voice broke through my spiraling thoughts. “Why’s Dad here?”

My throat was dry. “I’m not sure,” I answered, though I was very sure. It was always the same pattern. Celeste cried wolf; Kieran came running.

I parked haphazardly next to the Escalade. The gearshift clicked loudly in the quiet.

“Stay here,” I ordered Daniel, unbuckling my seatbelt.

His hand froze on his own seatbelt. “But—”

“I mean it, Daniel.” I tried to make my voice gentle, but it still came out strained.

I opened the car door. “Do not get out until your father leaves.”

He hesitated, frowning. I felt a slight twinge of guilt. I was hardly ever strict with Daniel, but I was already high-strung from the fiasco at the Lockwood Manor.

Plus, he’d seen too much tonight already. His small face still carried the traces of confusion and worry from the Lockwood manor. I didn’t want my son to hear me and his father exchange verbal blows.

I reached out and brushed his hair back, trying to smile. "It's okay, sweetheart. We're just going to talk."

He nodded slowly, though the uncertainty in his eyes told me he didn't believe it was "okay."

When I opened the door and stepped out, the evening air bit at my skin. The street was quiet except for the rustle of dry leaves and the low hum of my car engine.

Kieran straightened as I approached, eyes immediately scanning me as though checking for injuries.

That look sent a bolt of something sharp through my chest, part ache, part anger, all tangled.

I crossed my arms, defensiveness prickling along my skin. "What did she tell you this time? That I attacked her unprovoked? That I assaulted her with my son's cookies?"

"Sera—"

"Or maybe she went a different angle," I pressed, my voice sharpening. "Tell me, did she paint the altercation to make me seem like an unfit mother?"

He looked pained, and he opened his mouth to interrupt, but I didn't let him.

“I’m done being your convenient villain, Kieran,” I said coldly. “And I can’t believe you would come here to scold me in front of our son after the way she treated him right in front of you!”

Something in his expression shifted—guilt? Frustration? Maybe both. “I didn’t come to scold you, Sera,” he said finally, his tone quiet. “I came to talk.”

I blinked, surprised by his subdued demeanor. But I refused to let my guard down. “I have nothing to talk to you about.”

“You always say that,” he murmured, stepping closer. “But we both know that’s not true.”

I laughed once, brittle and humorless. “Do we?”

Kieran sighed. “Look, Sera—about me and Celeste—”

“I hear you’re getting married soon,” I spat out. “Congratulations.”

He froze. “What?”

“Look,” I said, gesturing vaguely, suddenly exhausted. “I genuinely, genuinely don’t give a fuck about what goes on with you and Celeste. You can marry her, parade her around as your Luna, and have the

picture-perfect life you've been dreaming of. I just want one thing—keep her away from me and my son.”

After that, silence stretched taut. The lamplight cut across his features, throwing shadows that made him look haunted.

Then he said the last thing I expected: “There’s not going to be a wedding.”

I must have misheard him. “What?”

“I broke up with Celeste,” he said. His voice was quiet, but the words were clear.

My first instinct was disbelief. “Is that—” Then anger surged. “What kind of stupid joke is this, Kieran?”

He shook his head firmly. “It’s not.”

I scoffed. “Celeste just gloated all up and down my mother’s house about your engagement party, and now you’re here spewing this bullshit?”

His jaw clenched. “I don’t know why she would say that after we’re broken up.”

I let out a sharp bark of laughter. “Goddess, you two are fucking exhausting. I’m not in the mood for this latest performance—”

“It’s not a performance,” he cut in sharply. “It’s over between me and Celeste. I mean it, Sera.”

The raw sincerity in his tone unnerved me. Was he... Could he possibly be telling the truth?

I squeezed my arms tighter around myself, desperate to contain the suddenly frantic pounding of my heart.

“Okay, let’s pretend for a moment that I believe you.” I arched a brow. “What the hell do you want from me? Congratulations? Condolences?”

He took a slow breath, as though choosing his words carefully. “No. I just thought you should know.”

“You thought I should know,” I echoed. “Why the fuck—”

Behind me, the car door creaked open.

“Mom?” Daniel’s small voice cut through.

I turned, my irritation melting instantly into softness. “I told you to stay inside the car, baby.”

His eyes darted between me and Kieran, and he moved closer instead.

“It’s fine,” Kieran said gently, crouching slightly to meet his eyes. “I just need to talk to your mom for a bit, bud.”

Daniel looked between us searchingly. Then, with more maturity than any nine-year-old should have, he nodded. “Okay.” He waved the house keys in his hands. “I’ll go inside. Mom, can I make some cereal?”

I nodded, my lower lip trembling. Gods, he was so precious. “Sure. But don’t eat too much; I’ll be right in to make dinner, sweetie.”

As soon as Daniel disappeared inside, the tension returned—thicker, heavier.

Kieran exhaled. “He’s a good kid,” he said quietly. “You raised him well.”

“I would share the credit, but you couldn’t stand to be in the same room as me, so I was never privy to your parenting technique.”

He inhaled sharply like I’d stabbed him in the heart. But he nodded slowly. “I deserve that.”

I scoffed.

“Sera,” he said after a long stretch of silence, “the real reason I broke up with Celeste, the real reason I came to tell you is because...” He stiffened, like he was bracing himself. “I did it because... because I couldn’t lie to myself anymore.”

I frowned. “Lie about what?”

He hesitated. His throat moved as he swallowed, and when he met my eyes, I saw something raw there. Something almost...helpless.

“About us,” he said simply. “About...what I feel for you.”

I went cold all over. “Kieran—”

“No, let me finish,” he said, his voice hoarse now. “I know I was an abhorrent bastard. I know I destroyed everything that could’ve been good between us. Fuck, I never even gave it a chance to be good. But every day since the divorce, I—”

He stopped, inhaled shakily. “I thought I’d feel relieved. Free. But I wasn’t. From the moment you walked out of our home, out of my life, I was...hollow.”

He looked at me like the word itself cost him something.

“I regret it,” he continued tightly. “All of it. The way I treated you. The way I let Celeste and my family poison my perception of you. The years I wasted pretending I didn’t care.”

I stared at him, my mind a tangle of disbelief and...more disbelief. “You regret it?” I repeated softly, almost to myself. “After all this time?”

He nodded. “Sera, you have no idea how sorry I—”

My sharp bark of laughter cut him off. “Is this how men work? You break something beyond repair, then decide you miss how it used to shine?”

“Sera—”

“Listen to yourself!” I gasped incredulously. “You sound like a disgruntled child, Kieran. You wanted Celeste when you had me, and now that you have her, you want me?”

“I—”

“Do you want me to say I forgive you?” I asked, stepping closer now, anger making my words tremble.

I couldn't believe he was doing this. After all the pain and heartache he caused me, I couldn't believe he was fucking doing this.

"Do you want redemption? A clean slate? A pat on the back for finally realizing what you had?"

If I had any sympathy to give, if I hadn't spent every day since our divorce armoring my heart, the hurt splashed across his face might have pierced me.

But.

"I'm not that woman anymore," I said. "The one who used to wait and hope and make excuses for you. She died a little with every cold night and every humiliation I endured while you pined after my sister."

"Sera, I don't expect forgiveness—"

"Good," I cut in sharply. "Because you won't get it."

Kieran nodded vigorously, his hair flopping slightly with his movement. "I know. I know. I've done too much to be let off the hook so easily. I just needed you to know that I'm done running from the truth. That I'm going to make things right—even if it takes the rest of my life."

I shook my head. "Breaking up with Celeste doesn't make things right."

"I know."

"It doesn't erase what you did."

"I know."

"And it doesn't change what we are. Or rather, what we're not."

"I know that too."

"Then why are you here?" I demanded. "If not to be forgiven, then what the ever-loving fuck do you want from me?"

Kieran's eyes softened, and that made it worse. "You," he said simply. "Not your forgiveness. Not your understanding. Just...you."

I froze. His words punched straight through my ribcage, closing icy fingers around my heart.

When I turned away, it was partly to hide the sudden moisture in my eyes. “Don’t,” I whispered. “Don’t say things you don’t mean.”

“I do.”

I almost laughed again, but it came out as a broken sound this time. “And what? You think we can just undo the last ten years? You think you can walk back into my life and I’ll fall into your arms because you finally decided to see me? To choose me?”

“No,” Kieran said quietly. “But I can start by not losing you again.”

The last shred of my composure snapped.

“Don’t you dare,” I hissed, turning back to him. “You didn’t lose me. You threw me away!”

He flinched as I continued, “You don’t get to rewrite history because your conscience is acting up.”

He didn’t back down. “This isn’t about conscience.”

“Then what is it about?”

He hesitated—just long enough for the truth to flicker behind his eyes before he said it.

“It’s about the bond,” he whispered. “You feel it too, don’t you?”