

My Sister 178

Chapter 178 UPSIDE-DOWN DIMENSION

CELESTE'S POV

The whiskey burned down my throat like liquid fire.

I slammed the glass onto the counter and motioned for another. The bartender hesitated—probably because I'd already had too many—but one glare from me and he poured anyway.

Bass thumped through Luna Noire's overhead speakers, vibrating against the wood and metal like a pulse I couldn't silence.

Around me, laughter and wolf-scent mingled thickly with alcohol and desperation.

I hated it. I hated all of it. The stench of weak wolves pretending to matter. The way they looked at me now—like I was just another pretty mess, not the Lockwood princess I was. Not the Blackthorne Queen I was supposed to be.

My reflection in the mirror behind the bar looked like a stranger—smudged lipstick, dark-ringed eyes too bright, too sharp, too furious. I barely recognized myself.

My mother's words still rang in my ears, louder than the music.

‘You’ve done enough damage, Celeste,’ she’d said, her hands shaking as she gathered up the cookie mess her graceless grandson had made.

‘I’m your daughter!’ I had screamed. ‘You never said that to Sera when she ruined everything!’

‘Sera didn’t ruin anything!’ She’d glared at me. ‘I’m just sorry it took so long to see that. You just can’t stand that the world stopped revolving around you.’

‘You pretentious bitch!’ I’d spat out. ‘You put a crown on my head and now are shocked when I want to rule?’

My cheek still throbbed from the slap she’d given me, and the memory cut sharper than the drink.

I’d hurled her treasured crystal vase—Father’s gift for their twentieth anniversary—against the wall, shards scattering as I stormed out of the manor. I didn’t look back; I couldn’t bear to. And my mother didn’t make any attempt to follow or call after me.

Not like she’d called for Sera.

That memory burned too—the image of my bitch sister leaving, her perfect little son clutching her hand, Mother teary-eyed behind them.

Now here I was.

I couldn't call Ethan; he was on Sera's side, too. Every time I dialed Kieran, it went straight to voicemail.

And I would sooner slit my own throat than have Abby and Emma witness my humiliating fall from grace.

So I was all alone.

The great Celeste Lockwood, future Luna of nothing.

On the TV above the bar, a broadcast replay of the stupid fucking LST that people wouldn't shut up about flickered.

Of course, in the universal conspiracy to mock me, the screen cut to Sera and her team. And there my sister stood, serene and composed, her fair hair gleaming under the lights as she stood in that champion's stance, commanding respect she didn't deserve.

The caption read: 'Lockwood heiress reclaims her power.'

My blood boiled.

What a load of bullshit.

“She’s not the heiress,” I muttered, gripping my glass so tight my knuckles went white. Fuck, everything was upside down. “I was supposed to be that. Me.”

“Talking to yourself, sweetheart?” a voice drawled from behind me.

I turned—three men leaned against the bar, all broad-shouldered and grinning the kind of grin that made my skin crawl. Low-ranked wolves whose inebriation made them stupid.

Ugh, Luna Noire was scraping the barrel in terms of clientele.

“Leave me alone,” I said flatly, turning back to my drink.

But they didn’t. One slid closer. “A pretty thing like you shouldn’t be drinking alone. What pack are you from?”

“The one that would tear your throat out if you touched me.” I didn’t even look at him.

I ignored the small stab of pain when I realized I wasn't even sure Frostbane wolves would actually ever come to my aid if I was in trouble. "Now get lost."

That should've done it. But my tone—icy, sharp—just made them laugh.

"Feisty," one said, fingers brushing my arm. A shiver of revulsion spread through my body from the point of contact. "Come on, sweetheart, we're just trying to be friendly."

"Don't touch me." I shoved his hand off, but the movement made my vision tilt. Too much whiskey.

At the spike of panic, my wolf stirred faintly under my skin—but didn't respond. I'd been suppressing her for almost a year, and now she was barely a whisper inside me.

The man's smile twisted. "Don't play hard to get. It's not hot."

"Back off," I snapped. But my voice shook. The bar was too loud, the lights too dim. A few other patrons noticed but looked away—no one wanted to get involved in a wolf fight after dark.

One of them grabbed my wrist, yanking me from the stool. Pain shot through my arm. "Let go!" I hissed, trying to twist free. But the alcohol made me sluggish. Their laughter turned cruel.

"You think you're too good for us, huh?" the second man jeered. "What are you, some Alpha's brat?"

'And sister and fiancé, you dick.' But my tongue was too heavy to form the words. Maybe I should have tattooed my forehead like Elara had suggested.

I stumbled, heart pounding as the room spun. My wolf whimpered, powerless. I swung wildly, hitting one square in the chest, but he barely flinched.

Then, just as panic clawed up my throat, threatening to cut off my air supply, the atmosphere shifted.

A dark, commanding growl ripped through the space, low and lethal.

"Touch her again," a voice said from the shadows, "and I'll break every bone in your worthless body."

The grip on my wrist vanished instantly. The men froze, and my breath hitched as the crowd parted, revealing the man who'd spoken.

For a moment, I thought I was hallucinating.

Of all the people in the world who could have walked into the bar I chose to wallow in tonight...

No, it wasn't possible.

It couldn't be him.

My pulse stuttered.

And yet—

It was.

SERAPHINA'S POV

I didn't sleep well.

Every time I closed my eyes, I saw Kieran's face—the flash of agony in his eyes when I told him I didn't want him.

The desperation in his voice echoed in my mind, over and over—'I just want...you'—until exhaustion finally dragged me under.

But even then, sleep wasn't peace. Somewhere in the distance, an anguished howl had ripped through the night—raw, wounded, relentless.

I wasn't sure if it was real or something my heart conjured from guilt, but it lodged itself in my mind like an echo I couldn't silence, vibrating through my bones and skin till it felt like it was coming out of me.

Morning took forever to come, but finally, warm, bright light filtered in through my blinds.

The faint scent of vanilla and pancakes greeted me before I even opened my eyes. My lids were heavy as I blinked awake, groggy and slightly disoriented, more exhausted than when I'd fallen asleep.

I was just stretching, wondering why Daniel's side of the bed was empty, when the door gently creaked open.

"Morning, Mom," my son said shyly from the doorway, flour dusting his cheek.

The sight of him—his bright eyes, his happy little grin—warmed something in me that the night had frozen. "I made breakfast."

I blinked, stifling a yawn. "You cooked?"

He nodded proudly. “Your cooking always makes me feel better, so I wanted to do the same for you.”

“Oh, baby.” I sat up and spread my arms open.

He didn’t hesitate as he moved into the circle of my embrace. I hugged him tight, breathing in the sugar and butter scent mixed with his.

“Thank you, my love.”

The pancakes, it turns out, were crunchy on the outside and mushy on the inside. But I wolfed it all down, and honestly, it made me feel so much better.

After breakfast, we dressed quickly.

Daniel had an early Alpha training course at Christian’s estate, something he was both nervous and excited about.

I knew Christian had started teaching him gradually on Kieran’s island, but when he called to arrange this particular course, I had been a little miffed that I wasn’t included in the decision to start Alpha training officially.

But I'd long since learned to pick my battles when it came to the Blackthornes.

The car ride was peaceful—just the hum of the engine and Daniel's chatter about wolf formations and tactics. His enthusiasm was contagious, and I could feel my mood getting brighter and brighter.

Christian and Leona's mansion stood tall and silver under the morning sun, a banner with Nightfang's crest—a black wolf's head snarling beneath a silver crescent moon, framed by pale laurels and set on a moonlit shield—fluttering in the wind.

Over the decade of my marriage with Kieran, I'd only had cause to visit here once or twice. None of those visits was welcoming, and each left me wary of the next.

I knew that logically, Kieran had no reason to be in his parents' home. But that didn't stop the tight knot of anxiety from forming in my stomach as we stopped in front of the grand stairs.

Leona met us at the front steps, the picture of grace and perfection.

Instinctively, I braced for her usual coolness—but her expression softened when she saw me.

"Seraphina," she said. "You look well."

"Thank you," I replied carefully. "So do you."

She nodded, glancing at Daniel, and stretched out a hand to him. “Hello, my little Alpha.”

He darted forward and hugged her tightly, vibrating with excitement and nerves. “Where’s Grandpa!”

Leona chuckled. “He’s already in the south courtyard waiting for you. Go on, darling.”

Daniel hopped once and turned to me. “Bye, Mom!”

He took off at once, and I watched him go, my chest swelling with pride—and just a hint of trepidation.

‘Don’t grow up too fast,’ I thought earnestly.

At Daniel’s departure, an awkward air settled between me and Leona. Unbidden, I remembered our last conversation, how I told her firmly that I was over Kieran.

I wondered what she would think now if she knew what had transpired between me and her son last night.

The stabbing ache in my chest at the thought of Kieran was my cue to leave.

“Well.” I nodded and turned away.

But she called after me before I’d taken a step. “Sera, wait.”

I paused and turned back, cautious.

She approached, hesitated, then pulled a small, wrapped box from behind her back and extended it to me. “This is for you. A belated congratulations on your victory at the LST...and an apology.”

I stared at the package like she was handing me a grenade.

“Leona, you don’t have to—”

“I do.” Her eyes met mine, unflinching. “I was wrong about you, Seraphina. We all were. You deserved better—both from the pack and from the rest of us.”

What the actual hell was going on? First Kieran last night, and now...this?

Did I somehow trip and fall into an alternate, upside-down dimension?

“Please?” Leona pressed.

The sincerity in her voice caught me off guard.

I took the gift slowly, my throat tightening as I opened it.

Inside was a silver pendant intricately engraved with Nightfang’s crest. On the back, my name was inscribed.

“I...” What the hell was I supposed to do with this? I was no longer a member of their pack—not like I truly was to begin with.

I didn’t want anything tying me to Kieran, dammit.

Regardless, I inclined my head and said softly, “Thank you.”

She smiled—small, genuine. “No, Sera. Thank you.”

With everything that happened lately, it felt oddly jarring to be going camping with my teammates.

It was an OTS-sponsored retreat for the winning team, and they'd been planning the trip since after the LST, while I was drowning in my personal drama.

It was a little surreal to consider that it had barely been a week, and so much had happened since then.

I definitely needed a distraction from the rollercoaster my life had become.

By the time I reached the campsite, the forest was alive with laughter and woodsmoke, and my squadmates were scattered in different stations.

The scent of pine and damp earth filled the air, grounding me in a way I hadn't felt for days.

"Sera!" Judy ran up and pulled me into a hug. "You actually came! We thought you'd bail."

I frowned. "Why would you think that?"

She shrugged. "You haven't exactly been active in the group the last couple of days."

Guilt pricked me. “You’re right, I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. Being a hotshot champion is a daunting task.” She winked. “We get it.”

I laughed, feeling the first threads of tension unravel.

She threw her arm over my shoulder and led me towards the rest of the group. “Come on, you’re the last to arrive. We need to share duties among the six of us.”

My brows furrowed. “The six of us?”

She smirked, nudging me mischievously. “If you opened the group chat, you’d know about our last-minute invite.”

“Who—”

The answer came before I could finish the question.

He stood at the edge of the campsite, arms laden with firewood, framed by the shifting dapple of sunlight through the trees.

Our eyes locked at the same time, and the previously loosening threads of tension rewove themselves tightly around my heart.

Lucian.

So much for a break.