

## **My Sister 180**

### Chapter 180 COUPLE GOALS

#### SERAPHINA'S POV

If I'd known Lucian would be here, I might've made an excuse to skip this trip entirely.

Not because I hated him—goddess, I wished it were that simple—but because I felt uncertain and exposed. After the Zara bomb, I was struggling to understand the new dynamic between us. I didn't know what I wanted from him or from myself.

It had barely been two days since I asked for space. I hadn't learned how to master the art of avoidance.

Now, I could only hope I'd figure out how to handle this as it unfolded.

For a moment, everything—the laughter, the sunlight, the smell of pine—blurred into background noise.

His gaze was steady but cautious, as if he wasn't sure whether to smile or retreat. He looked older somehow, like our last conversation was twenty years ago, not just a couple of days.

His hair was out of its usual neat bun and brushed his shoulders, a little disheveled. His usual poise was replaced with quiet fatigue.

I pulled my gaze away from him and turned to Judy, forcing a smile that probably fooled no one. "I didn't know he'd be here."

Judy smiled, oblivious to the way my stomach had dropped. "Yeah, we invited him at the last minute. I mean, can you imagine a victory retreat without our founder?"

Right. Duh.

Lucian was the one who created OTS, the one who built it from the ground up. It made sense that everyone saw him as the heart of the group.

If Zara were alive, she'd probably be invited too.

Ah shit.

The whole Kieran...debacle had distracted me from the Lucian situation. But now, the Lucian situation had shoved the Kieran debacle to the back of my mind.

Do you know what would have been amazing? If I were born human. Then I could be a nun and take a vow of abstinence from men.

And my life would be a million times easier.

“Come on.” Judy clapped her hands once, grinning. “Let’s get you squared away.”

I managed a nod, though my pulse hadn’t steadied.

Muscle memory took over, and I went on autopilot. My mind scrambled to reorient, to adjust to the reality of spending the next two days in proximity to the person I’d asked for space from.

I could feel Lucian’s presence like heat on the back of my neck. Now and then, when I risked a glance, I caught him stealing one too.

True to my request, he kept his distance and made no attempt to speak to me.

I should have been content with that, but then I heard him talking with my teammates in that his engaging tone, laughing, smiling that same charismatic smile that had once made me feel safe.

He still looked maddeningly composed. Of course he did. He was Lucian Reed—calm, collected. The Alpha who could charm his way through anything.

And now I was in a shitty mood.

Judy noticed first.

We were sitting on a fallen log by the firepit, slicing vegetables for the barbecue, when she leaned closer, lowering her voice.

“Okay, spill. What’s going on between you and Mr. Tall-and-brooding over there?”

I nearly dropped the knife. “What?”

“Don’t play dumb,” she said, arching a brow. “You’ve barely looked at him since you got here. And he’s been looking at you like a kicked puppy.”

“He’s not—” I sighed. “It’s complicated.”

“Complicated is my favorite flavor,” Judy said, grinning. “Come on. I know I’m not almighty Maya Cartridge, but we’re friends, right?”

I laughed softly. “According to your mother, we’re sisters.”

She giggled, nudging me. “Exactly. So what’s up?”

I hesitated. Heat prickled my cheeks as the words swelled against my throat, trying to burst out of their own accord. Keeping everything bottled up was exhausting.

Finally, I exhaled. "We broke up."

Judy blinked. "Oh." Then, softer, "Oh, Sera."

Her expression melted into sympathy, and somehow that hurt even more than if she'd teased me.

Before I could say more, someone coughed behind us. We turned toward the sound. Roxy stood there with a tray of skewers, looking guilty as sin.

"I—uh—I didn't mean to eavesdrop," she said quickly. "I just—"

"Roxy, it's fine." I gave her a small smile. "You didn't do anything wrong."

Her face crumpled. "Is it... Is it because of what I said?" I'd never seen Roxy look so remorseful before. "About his mate?"

I was too slow to reply, and her eyes widened. She dropped onto the log beside me, clutching the tray a little tighter.

“Fuck, Sera, I was just being a bitch. I didn’t mean to—”

“Roxy,” I cut her off gently. “You didn’t cause the breakup. You just...helped me see things more clearly. I was the one who made the choice.”

“Still,”—she winced—“you shouldn’t have heard that from me.”

I nodded. “You’re right. But that’s not on you. I should have heard it from him long before you had the chance to tell me.”

Her eyes shimmered. “I’m so sorry, Sera.”

Judy raised a brow. “Who are you and what have you done with our resident scorpion?”

Roxy shifted the tray to one hand and shot out her middle finger at Judy.

That made me laugh, and the weight in my chest loosened a little, my shoulders dropping as some of the tension eased out of me.

Roxy turned back to me. “We’re good...right?”

I gave her hand a reassuring pat. “We’re good.”

Judy gave me a sideways look once Roxy left. “You’re sure?”

I leaned to the side and rested my head against her shoulder, the half-chopped onions long forgotten.

I’d barely scratched the surface of the mountain of emotional shit looming before me. But I really, really didn’t want to wade through all the thoughts of grief, confusion, and hurt that kept swirling in my head. Not on this trip, at least.

So I forced a smile I didn’t quite feel. “Yeah. I’m sure.”

When we rejoined the group, the atmosphere had shifted subtly.

Maybe Judy’s knowing glances were a little too obvious. Or maybe Roxy wasn’t the only one who overheard our conversation. Either way, the laughter felt thinner, the air heavier.

And then came Talia, bounding up with surprising enthusiasm.

“Okay! So, plans for dinner—Lucian and Sera are on grill-duty together.”

I froze. “What?”

She winked, oblivious. “Yep. Oh, and I got these adorable matching aprons for you two!”

She produced two matching black aprons with ‘King of the Grill’ and ‘Queen of the Grill’ printed. Placed side by side, a tiny red heart connected the phrases.

Talia beamed, obviously proud of herself. “Couple goals, right?”

Judy winced.

Roxy facepalmed.

Lucian opened his mouth. “Actually, I think I should go—”

“It’s fine,” I cut in, a little too sharply. “Thanks, Talia.”

Lucian turned to me, eyes searching, and spoke to me for the first time today. “Sera...”



“It’s fine,” I repeated, this time too brightly. “Let’s just get started.”

If he was going to leave, I wasn’t going to be the reason.

Because regardless of what we were now—or weren’t—this trip wasn’t about us. It was about OTS, the team he built, the people who looked up to him. And I had to admit, I was still one of those people.

Lucian Reed might have been a flawed man. But he was an infallible leader.

And that was that.

As I tied the apron around my waist, I caught Judy exchanging a weighted glance with Roxy.

Talia cleared her throat and continued handing out the rest of the assignments with a little less enthusiasm than before.

The moment passed, but the awkwardness lingered like smoke that refused to fade. Everyone could feel it now: the undercurrent of tension thrumming faintly between us—thin, fragile, like a string pulled too tight.

Lucian kept his distance, polite but restrained. When our hands brushed over the same pair of tongs, we both flinched slightly, pretending not to notice.

Still, somehow, amidst the discomfort, I found a strange sense of calm. Maybe it was the forest, the company, the small flickers of normalcy. Or maybe it was simply that I'd made peace with my choice.

Lucian had hurt me, yes. But not in the same way Kieran had. Lucian's flaw wasn't cruelty—it was control. His need to steer everything, to protect me, even if it meant keeping me in the dark.

But after being out of control for so long, I wanted to be the one steering my own path.

Even if that meant walking beside him, without ever reaching for his hand again.