

## **My Sister 182**

Chapter 182 FRIENDS DON'T KISS

SERAPHINA'S POV

Lucian's answer lingered in the night air, so charged that even the forest seemed to tense and hold its breath.

And he wasn't done.

"If I'd been honest sooner—if I'd trusted someone enough to share the truth instead of controlling it—maybe things would've been different."

"Who?" Finn's soft voice floated through the air.

Lucian's gaze remained steady on the fire, the reflection of its glow flickering in his eyes.

"Someone who deserved better," he said quietly. "Someone I hurt because I thought I was protecting her."

No one spoke. The usual easy laughter that had filled the campsite faded into a kind of reverent silence, broken only by the sharp crackle of flames.

But even the fire seemed to burn quieter, its orange glow painting everyone's faces in thoughtful light.

I'd half expected Lucian to say something cryptic or charming, the kind of polished line Alphas often used to save face. But this—this wasn't for show.

The weight in his voice—cautious, regretful—carried an honesty that wasn't performative. He wasn't saying it for sympathy or attention; he was owning it.

A lump formed in my throat.

I knew I shouldn't read into it, shouldn't assume every regret he voiced was about me. But every syllable seemed to carve a path straight through my defenses.

I realized then that Lucian hadn't chosen truth out of pride or arrogance. He'd done it for me.

He hadn't wanted to make me uncomfortable with the dare. He'd chosen the harder path—honesty—knowing it might expose him in a way I'm sure he wasn't used to.

The firelight caught on his expression—somber, unguarded, so raw that my chest clenched.

He wasn't just talking about guilt. He was talking about regret. The kind that eats at you long after the dust has settled.

Alina's voice stirred faintly in the back of my mind, soft and measured. 'He means it. He's a good Alpha—flawed, but good. It's no wonder he once held your affection.'

I swallowed hard, my gaze fixed on the dancing flames.

"Okay," Roxy exhaled, leaning forward to spin the bottle. "I hereby forbid anyone else from picking truth."

Scattered laughter bounced through the group as the bottle landed on Talia.

Lucian didn't glance at me once during the rest of the game, and somehow that made it worse.

Everyone else, though, did—some openly, some sneaking peeks when they thought I wasn't looking. Their wide eyes and furrowed brows broadcast a curiosity that was suffocating.

It quickly got too much to bear.

"I'm going to get some air," I muttered, though we were literally outside.

Judy gave me a knowing look but didn't stop me as I stood, brushing ash and cracker crumbs from my shorts, and walked a few paces toward the lake.

The night air was cool, the scent of pine fresh and centering. I didn't realize how shallowly I'd been breathing until I was away from the firelight, and cold, fresh air filled my lungs with a deep breath.

A minute later, I heard footsteps behind me, and I didn't need to turn to know who they belonged to.

"Did I...say too much?" Lucian's voice broke the quiet, careful and hesitant.

I turned. He stood there a few feet away, hands in his pockets, firelight flickering behind him like an aura.

His usual self-assurance was gone, replaced by the uncharacteristic nervousness that was quickly becoming familiar on him.

I sighed. "You didn't. You just...caught everyone off guard."

He nodded slowly. "Everyone...or you?"

Yep.

I wrapped my arms around myself, suddenly feeling the chill. "You didn't have to answer like that. You could've kept it vague."

He instantly shrugged off his jacket, and before I could protest, the weight of it landed on my shoulders. The warmth of his scent surrounded me, and something more akin to nostalgia twisted my gut.

"I didn't want to," he said simply. "I spent enough time hiding behind vague answers. That's what put us in this position in the first place. I'm not going to do that anymore, Sera."

His tone tugged something deep inside me. Up close, I could see it clearer: the exhaustion etched into the lines of his face, the faint shadows under his eyes.

He'd been putting on a brave front, holding himself together for everyone else. But the mask didn't hold as well under the moonlight.

"You look tired," I murmured before I could stop myself.

Lucian huffed a laugh, low and quiet. "On a scale of one to ten, how cheesy is 'I can't sleep cause you've been running through my mind'?"

My laughter caught me by surprise. But oh gods, it felt so fucking good.

Two days. We'd stayed out of communication for much longer than that, but I didn't think I had missed Lucian as much as I realized I missed him right now.

"Twelve," I answered, my voice surprisingly light.

He nodded. "Yeah. That's what I feared."

He took a hesitant step closer. "Sera...about before. I meant what I said."

I looked away, tracing the ripple of moonlight on the lake's surface. "That you hurt someone important to you?"

"That I was an arrogant bastard who thought he was protecting her when all I was really doing was controlling her." His words strained. "I didn't realize how much damage I caused until it was too late."

The confession hit like a soft punch. There was no bravado, no justification—just remorse.

"You don't need to apologize again," I said quietly.

"I do," he insisted. "Not because I expect you to forgive me or"—he exhaled—"come back to me. But because you deserve to hear it. I'm sorry, Sera."

The sincerity in his eyes disarmed me. I think I expected defensiveness or stubborn Alpha pride. But this—this was different.

For a fleeting moment, I saw the Lucian I'd been falling for. The one who'd saved my life. Who'd believed in me before anyone else did. Who, first and foremost, had been my friend.

I smiled faintly. "Apology accepted."

His eyebrows lifted slightly, almost in disbelief.

"But," I added, "that doesn't mean we're...resuming anything. Let's just be friends. For now."

He smiled then—not the charming, practiced one he wore at public events, but a small, honest curve of his lips that crinkled the corners of his eyes.

"Friends," he repeated, only a little bit resigned. "I can live with that."

"Good," I said. "Because I don't do second chances easily."

He laughed under his breath. "You shouldn't. You're worth more than that."

The unexpected sincerity in that simple line made my stomach flutter in the way it did around Lucian.

I wonder if he told Zara she was worth more than that.

No.

I slammed a door shut on that thought and smiled at Lucian.

I stretched out my hand to him. "Well, friend. What do you say we rejoin the group?"

His smile lit up the night as he took my hand. "Let's."

When we returned to the campfire, the atmosphere was noticeably lighter. The sidelong glances turned into relieved smiles, and Roxy's dramatic sigh was loud enough to draw a round of laughter.

"Finally," she stage-whispered. "The tension in the air was giving me wrinkles."

I rolled my eyes, but couldn't help smiling.



The rest of the evening passed in a blur of chatter and laughter and the smell of grilled meat and melted chocolate.

I let myself unwind, and for the first time since setting foot on the campsite, I didn't feel like I was walking on eggshells.

Lucian kept his distance just enough—not hovering, but not withdrawn.

When I ran out of skewers, he silently handed me more. When I dropped a marshmallow in the fire, he fished out another one without a word. It was...easy. Familiar, almost painfully so.

As the night wore on, Judy broke out a bottle of wine, and I didn't stop her when she poured me a cup.

One cup turned into two, then three. Until the stars overhead spun slightly, glittering brighter than usual.

And, oh gods, the noise in my head...eased. The mountain of emotions flattened into a valley. Sweet, sweet peace.

"Okay, that's enough for you," Judy teased, tugging the fifth cup from my hand.

"I'm fine," I slurred, giggling as Roxy helped me to my feet.

"You're not fine," Roxy said, though she was laughing too. "You're smiling and staring into nothing like there's a ghost offering you free chocolate."

"That's oddly specific," I mumbled, swaying. "And weird. Roxy, do you see ghosts? You shouldn't take sweets from strangers, especially if they're dead."

Judy slapped a hand over her mouth and turned away. It did nothing to hide her snickers.

"Lucian!" Roxy called. "She's your responsibility tonight. You've got the tent closest to hers."

"Of course," he said, standing. His tone was calm, but the faint twitch of his mouth betrayed amusement.

Blinking rapidly, I poked a finger at all four of him. "You're laughing at me."

"Not at all," he said smoothly, reaching to steady me when I tripped over a stray branch.

"Liar."

"I wouldn't dare," he murmured, his hand warm on my elbow.

We walked slowly toward the tents, and my head buzzed pleasantly, the world slightly hazy at the edges.

When we reached my tent, I turned to face him, wobbling a little. "Thanks for walking me home."

He snorted. "This isn't your home, but you're very welcome."

There was absolutely nothing humorous about his statement. Yet, my head fell back as I laughed so hard I lost my balance.

Lucian caught me by the shoulders, steadying me effortlessly.

"Thank you," I giggled.

"Always," he said softly.

I gripped his forearm. "You're a good friend."

"I don't know," he muttered, the amusement draining from his voice. His gaze lingered on mine for a moment too long. "I know we just established that rapport, but I think I'm failing at that already."

The air between us changed—thickened. His hand was still on my arm, thumb brushing lightly against my skin.

I didn't move away, though I knew I should.

"You shouldn't look at me like that," I whispered, eyes half-lidded.

"Like what?"

"Like you want to kiss me."

He exhaled slowly, a small, crooked smile touching his lips. "Can't help it. You make it hard not to."

My heart skipped. For one terrifying second, I thought I might let him. But the haze cleared slightly, just enough for a bit of clarity to come shining through.

I steadied myself, gently pressing a hand against his chest.

“Friends don’t kiss,” I said.

His laugh was quiet, rough around the edges. “Then what do friends do?”

I smiled sleepily. “They...hug?”

And before he could respond, I looped my arms around his neck and hugged him. He froze for half a heartbeat, then exhaled and wrapped his arms around me, warm and steady.

It wasn’t romantic—it wasn’t supposed to be. But I liked it. I liked it a lot.

When I finally pulled back, he looked like he wanted to say something, but stopped himself.

“Goodnight, Lucian,” I murmured.

He nodded once, that small, restrained smile still on his face. “Goodnight, Sera.”

As I crawled into my tent, I caught one last glimpse of him standing there under the starlight—silent, thoughtful, and maybe, just maybe, a little hopeful.

I fell asleep as soon as my head hit my pillow, cocooned by the fragile possibility of something that might, someday, be worth rebuilding.