

## **My Sister 184**

Chapter 184 PRACTICALLY ALARMING

SERAPHINA'S POV

It started with water.

Cold, black water lapping at my ankles—except I couldn't feel the chill on my bare feet.

Then came the sound. A steady drip. Drip. Drip. Each drop echoed like it fell into a deep, hollow basin.

The air fogged before me, misty and uneven, yet I couldn't feel myself breathing.

My feet were moving. But...I wasn't in control of them.

I didn't fight it. I let them lead me forward until the fog parted, revealing a narrow stairwell lit by a flickering bulb.

The metal steps groaned as I descended, my pulse quickening, each breath heavier than the last.

Then I heard it—whispering. Or...muttering? Humming? The sound was strange, warbled, like it came from someone who had forgotten what a voice was supposed to sound like.

The basement came into view, dim and cold. Water puddled in some corners. Chains hung idly along one wall. And in the far darkest corner—

Celeste.

Or at least...a warped version of her.

Her once-glossy hair now hung in tangled clumps around her face like wilted vines. Her cheeks were sunken, her collarbones jutted out, angular and too defined.

She wore a torn dress shirt, filthy and shredded near the hem. Bruises, old and fresh, painted her skin.

The air lodged in my throat.

“Celeste?” My voice echoed in the empty room. I reached out—only to find I couldn’t get closer. My body wouldn’t move now.

She didn’t look up. She just curled tighter around herself, rocking, knees pulled against her chest like a frightened child hiding from monsters.

“Celeste!” I tried again, panic lacing each syllable. “It’s me, Sera!”

She flinched. Hugged herself tighter.

“Celeste—look at me,” I whispered, voice cracking.

Slowly, she did.

I swallowed a sharp gasp.

Her eyes—gods.

Not angry. Not smug. Not cold. Not like I was used to.

Just...empty. As if everything she was had been drained through a crack somewhere I couldn’t see.

Her chapped lips moved, barely forming two silent words: ‘Help me.’

My entire body seized with horror and something I couldn't name—something primal and raw and consuming.

“Celeste!” I screamed.

I jolted upright.

My lungs seized like I'd inhaled ice. My heart hammered so violently I thought I might be dying.

My room was dark, faint moonlight spilling across the floor through the curtains.

Then—

Warmth. Tiny arms wrapped sleepily around my waist.

“Mom?” Daniel's voice was thick and groggy. He still hadn't moved back into his room since he returned, and tonight, I was more than grateful for that.

“Did you have a nightmare?”

His palm pressed gently over my heart, feeling its frantic rhythm. His brows crinkled. “Your heart’s beating really fast.”

I forced a breath in. Then another. I smoothed my hand through his curly hair with a trembling exhale.

“Just a bad dream,” I whispered, even though calling it a dream felt like a misnomer. It had been too real—like I’d been there, breathing in the dampness of that room, tasting Celeste’s fear as my own.

“Wanna talk about it?” he mumbled, already half-asleep again.

Did I want to talk about it?

Did I want to explain to my young son how terrifying it felt to watch someone as ostentatious and extraverted as Celeste be reduced to that...that...

What the hell was that?

“No,” I murmured, kissing Daniel’s forehead. “I’m fine. Go back to sleep, baby.”

He made a sleepy hum of agreement and tucked himself closer to me. I wrapped an arm around him, grounding myself in the steady thump of his little heartbeat.

Eventually, I lay back down.

I didn't sleep.

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Morning sunlight seeped through the kitchen windows, soft and golden, like a quiet apology for the night before.

Daniel yawned into his oatmeal while I packed snacks for Alpha training. He had more than enough to eat at his grandparents', but this felt like my own little contribution.

He kept glancing at me.

"You're too quiet," he finally said, spoon halfway to his mouth.

"I'm always quiet," I shrugged, peeling an apple.

"Yeah," he muttered, "but it's that loud quiet when I can literally hear your thoughts."

I paused.

I couldn't help it—I smiled a little. “You're way too observant for your own good.”

He grinned. “Yep.”

This time, I actually laughed, gently slicing into the apple. “Just hurry up and finish your breakfast.”

He shoveled another bite in, exaggeratedly fast, making a face like he was doing me a heroic favor.

I rolled my eyes fondly and nudged his water toward him. “Chew, Daniel. I'm raising a wolf pup, not a gremlin.”

He snorted into his cup. “I can be fast or I can be neat.”

I shook my head, tucking the apple slices into a container.

But he'd done it—my smile lingered. His warmth and light had thinned out the anxiety I'd carried since waking. I was still quiet, but my thoughts were no longer loud and chaotic.

I could finally hear the low hum of the fridge and Daniel kicking his feet against the chair leg, offbeat and steady.

When he finished, he dragged his bowl to the sink. “Are you picking me up after training?”

“Of course,” I said, sealing the snack box.

“Okay. Cool.” He hesitated, then stepped closer. “And...you’re okay, right?”

I inhaled slowly. “I will be.”

Daniel didn’t say anything, just nodded like he believed me.

Then he hugged me—quick and clumsy—and ran off to get his boots before I could tighten my arms around him and never let go.

I stood there a second longer, fingers still lightly pressed against my ribs where his arms had been.

Then I exhaled, grabbed the snack box, and followed him out into the quiet morning.

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Maya was already waving at me from the entrance of the spa when I arrived. Her hair was pulled into a sleek bun that was somehow chic even though she was in a hoodie and leggings.

“Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes,” she said, looping her arm through mine as soon as I was within reach. “Gods, it feels like we haven’t hung out in forever.”

I leaned against her. “I know, I’m sorry.”

She shrugged. “I get it, I’m just glad that the queen has deemed it fit to grace the common folk with her presence.”

“Stop.” I laughed as she gave a mock bow.

“Seriously, though, missing you sucks.” She tightened her hold on me. “Let’s never be apart again.”

I smiled. “Deal.”

We walked through the softly lit lobby, passing a row of women in white robes sipping cucumber water. The scent of lavender drifted through the air, easing the residual tension in my muscles.

“You look tired,” Maya said lowly as we checked in.

“I didn’t sleep well.”

She narrowed her eyes, her sharp gaze assessing. “Shit’s been going on.” It wasn’t a question.

I exhaled. “Like you wouldn’t believe.”

She cocked her head. “My first instinct is to wring the details out of you like a sponge,” she said. “But something tells me to wait till after we’re all massaged and pampered.”

I smiled faintly. Maya’s presence, coupled with the promise of heavy pampering, was already making me feel better. “I would much prefer that, thank you.”

As we settled into the tea lounge, awaiting our massage appointments, too-loud voices floated across the room.

“I swear they’re stalking us,” Maya muttered, glaring ahead. “They know when we come to the spa and align their appointments accordingly.”

I followed her gaze and sighed.

Emma and Abby.

But...

My fingers tightened around my teacup.

Celeste wasn't with them.

"I'm just saying," Abby was saying, twisting her fingers anxiously. "Celeste missing two consecutive facials is, like, unheard of."

Emma nodded. "Her skin is a finicky bitch; it can't go long without being pampered."

"I want to remind her," Abby whispered, "but last time I did something like that, she said if I nag her like a 'desperate maid' again, she'll throw my phone in a river."

Emma hummed thoughtfully. "Yeah, she hates reminders. She thinks it's an insult to her intelligence or some bullshit like that."

She sighed dramatically, “Besides, it doesn’t even matter; she’s ignored literally every text I’ve sent her.”

“You think she’s still mad about the LST?” Abby asked.

Emma scoffed. “Well, the sun rose this morning, so yeah.”

My grip on the cup tightened so much that I heard a crack.

“Lovely,” Maya muttered beside me. “Ethan just pushed back our date so you and I—”

She paused, noting my demeanor. “Hey, relax.” She leaned in. “You’re not really worried about her, are you?”

Logic, common sense, everything dictated that I shouldn’t spare Celeste a single idle thought, let alone concern.

I shrugged, but my shoulders felt too tight. “It’s odd though, isn’t it?”

Celeste was borderline religious about her beauty routines. Skipping an appointment was...strange. Skipping two? Practically alarming.

Maya rolled her eyes. “She probably hasn’t left her house since the LST meltdown—and rightfully so; that was embarrassing as fuck. House-call beauticians exist for a reason. She’s too vain to let her pores suffer.”

That should’ve made sense. It did make sense.

So why did I still feel uneasy?

My dream flickered behind my eyelids—Celeste’s sunken face, the bruises, the chains I couldn’t see but somehow knew were there.

I blinked hard and brought my cup to my lips.

Except my hand shook.

The porcelain slipped from my fingers.

Time slowed for half a second.

Crash.

The teacup shattered across the floor.

Every eye snapped toward me.

I stared at the broken pieces, my heart jackhammering. Too fast, too loud.

“Sera?” Maya’s concerned voice sounded as if it were coming through a vacuum.

“I’m fine,” I said quickly. “Just...slipped.”

One of the attendants rushed to clean it up.

“I’m so sorry,” I whispered.

“That’s okay,” she gave me a customer-friendly smile as she gathered the shards.

“I’m not usually clumsy,” I rambled, reaching down to help. “I’m so sorry.”

Maya caught my wrist gently and said, “Sera? What’s going on? You’re all...jittery.”

I inhaled. “I’m fin—”

My phone rang, cutting off the lie.

My fingers shook as I retrieved my phone, and the caller ID made my heart skip a beat.

Margaret.

My first assumption was that she wanted to talk about what happened at the manor—apologize or scold me, I wasn’t sure which way she was swinging these days.

But...something about the way my fingers suddenly went cold before I even answered filled me with foreboding.

“Seraphina?” Her voice wasn’t sharp or composed—it was tight, strained, and on the verge of tremor. “Have you—have you heard from Celeste lately?”

My breath caught.

“No,” I said slowly. “Why?”

Silence.

Then it broke.

“She’s missing,” my mother whispered, voice cracking like porcelain under pressure.

Ice filled my veins.