

My Sister 208

Chapter 208 SUCKER FOR JEWELRY

SERAPHINA'S POV

My mother's voice pulled me back to the present.

"Seraphina, dear?"

I blinked, the memory dissolving like mist. The sketchpad still lay open beside me, Kieran's penciled profile gazing toward the window.

There was moisture dripping down my cheek.

"Oh—sorry," I said quickly, brushing under my eyes before my mother could notice. Emotion still lingered from the memory, but I forced a steadier tone. "Just got lost in thought. Remembering something."

She stood at the doorway, her expression caught between fondness and worry. "Good memories, I hope?"

I held back a derisive snort and gave a noncommittal shrug. "Old ones."

That was when I noticed that the space beside me was empty. Gods, how long was I zoned out for?

“Maya?” I asked.

“Off somewhere with her nephews,” Mother said, shaking her head. “Those boys are full of energy. I do hope they don’t exhaust her like they’ve done their poor father.”

I smiled faintly. “Maya can handle them.”

My mother hesitated before stepping closer, smoothing a hand over her immaculate skirt. “Are you alright, Sera?”

I shrugged, closing the sketchpad and locking the memory away.

She studied me quietly for a moment, and I took the opportunity to do the same.

Up close, I noticed what I hadn’t at lunch—the faint shadows beneath her eyes, the lines that even her careful makeup couldn’t quite conceal.

“What about you?” I asked softly. “Are you alright?”

Her hand paused mid-motion. "Of course," she said quickly, but the tightness in her voice betrayed her.

I reached out, touching her arm. "Mother."

She sighed. "It's a topic I doubt you want to discuss."

"Try me."

"It's...Celeste."

The name had the same effect on me as pouring salt on a worm.

Of course it was about Celeste.

"Isn't she living it up in Catherine's villa?" I tried to keep my voice light, but the bitterness slipped through anyway.

My mother winced. "You make it sound like a vacation."

“Isn’t it?” I asked dryly. “She’s in a luxurious villa on the beach, with endless ocean views and servants attending to her every whim.”

Mother exhaled slowly, glancing toward the window as if searching for calm. “I’ve been calling her,” she said. “Regularly. But she rarely answers, and when she does, she’s...distracted. Distant. I hoped she’d be back by now, but...” Her shoulders rose in a helpless shrug.

I could imagine it—Celeste lounging on some sun-drenched veranda, replying to our mother with annoyed disinterest before cutting the call short.

“I offered to come visit,” Mother added, “but she rebuffed me. Said she doesn’t want to see any of ‘you people’.” She sighed. “She’s still so upset.”

I held back a scoff. Judging by Celeste’s track record, that was going to last another ten years. I wasn’t even going to bother denying the delight I felt at that. If I never saw her again, it would be too soon.

But my mother was not me, and Celeste was not a thorn in her side. She actually adored the little she-devil more than she ever did me.

“Ethan’s not happy about it,” Mother continued. “He says if she wants to alienate herself, we should let her. That I shouldn’t lower myself to chase after her when she’s being rude. But...” Her voice wavered. “She’s still my daughter, Sera.”

I think it was a testament to my growth that my first instinct wasn’t to give my mother a scathing reminder that I was her daughter, too, and she never seemed to care as much about me as she did Celeste.

"I'm...sorry," I forced out.

She shook her head. "It's not your fault." Her expression was earnest when she looked at me. "None of this is your fault, Sera."

It felt like she was talking about more than Celeste's bitch fit. As if she were trying to apologize for years of conditioned blame.

Like I'd told Ethan, I wasn't interested in rehashing painful memories today. I'd slipped with Kieran's memory, but wouldn't again.

So I turned away.

"You should go, regardless," I said. "Go see her if you miss her that much. You could use that opportunity to see Catherine, too. You haven't seen her in a while, right?"

My mother was silent for a beat, and I figured she was thinking it over. After all, Celeste was the apple of her eye; nobody else ever really measured—

"Actually, I'm going to stay," she surprised me by saying. "At least until Daniel's heir ceremony."

I turned back to her, unable to stop my brows from rising. “That’s...more important?”

She looked slightly offended. “Of course. Your father and I talked about that moment all the time. We couldn’t wait.”

My lips pulled up slightly. “I’m glad Daniel has grandparents who adore him so much.”

Her voice warmed. “It’s more than that. Being a part of Daniel’s ceremony feels like...redemption.”

I tilted my head. “For what?”

Her eyes flicked away, then back to me. Then away again.

“For not giving you a proper coming-of-age ceremony,” she admitted quietly. “It’s something I’ve always regretted, Sera.”

Her words—and the honesty in her tone—startled me.

The coming-of-age ceremony wasn’t unlike the heir ceremony, but it was held when one got their wolf. So, naturally, I didn’t have one.

Celeste's was grand, the biggest party for a twelve-year-old I'd ever experienced.

I opened my mouth to respond, but my mother stood suddenly, straightening her posture as if afraid to linger in vulnerability.

"Come with me," she said. "There's something I've been meaning to give you."

She led me down the hall to the master bedroom, where the air still smelled faintly of my father's leather and amber scent.

The curtains were drawn halfway, sunlight catching on the carved mirror and the delicate silver frame that held a photo of us, taken a long time ago, when I was a toddler. Back when we fit the illusion of a perfect family.

Mother crossed to her vanity, opening a drawer with deliberate care. When she turned back to me, she held a small satin box in both hands.

"I was saving this for your wedding," she said quietly. "But...that didn't..." She trailed off, and I had no intention of helping her finish her train of thought.

My wedding hadn't necessarily been a joyful event for presents.

“Anyways,” she exhaled. “I think Daniel’s ceremony is as good a moment as any. I’m sorry it’s belated.”

She opened the box, revealing a thin gold bracelet, worn smooth over the years and polished to a soft glow.

“It belonged to my mother,” she explained. “She gave it to me when I married your father. I always meant for it to go to you.”

I stared at it for a long moment, struggling to reconcile my small hopeful warmth with suspicion.

Was she giving it to me because Celeste wasn’t around to receive it first? Because her engagement had fallen through?

“Why now?” I asked.

My mother shuffled her feet, her gaze fixed on everything but me, and the awkward display was the most shocking thing I’d seen all day.

“What is it?”

She hesitated, eyes flicking up to mine. “When you arrived earlier today,” she said slowly, “Sylvia noticed something different about you.”

Alina perked up at the mention of my mother's wolf.

"Your scent—it's changed. Stronger. I wanted to ask, but..." A rueful smile ghosted over her lips. "I didn't want to push you too hard and ruin the fragile peace we've managed to build."

For a heartbeat, neither of us spoke.

Then she added softly, "When I saw you sitting in your old room just now, I thought—Goddess, how much I've missed you. I wanted to come in and just...hold you. But then you looked up, and you seemed so far away, and..." She sighed. "It reminded me of the distance between us. The one I let grow."

My throat tightened.

"And I know it's my fault," she whispered, her hand brushing mine. "I pushed you away. I wasn't there for you when you needed your mother. I'm so sorry, Sera."

I swallowed back a well of emotion.

"How do I know you mean that? How am I sure you're not just giving me this because Celeste's no longer available?"

She didn't look offended at my accusation.

She simply tilted the bracelet toward me. The light caught the initials etched along the inner curve. T, M, S.

Tabitha.

Margaret.

Seraphina.

"She had it engraved before she gave it to me, and I did the same," my mother explained. "Eleven years ago."

Tears blurred my vision, and I had to blink furiously to keep them at bay.

This wasn't an afterthought. Like Kieran, this was my mother's way of trying to reach me again.

Maybe I was softer than I thought. Maybe I was pathetic. Or maybe I was just a sucker for jewelry.

I smiled softly. "It's beautiful."

Her eyes softened, and she smiled then, not the polished, hostess smile she wore for the Cartridges, but something small and trembling.

"I only wish I'd given it to you sooner. There are many things I wish I had done. And a lot more I wish I didn't do."

Her words cracked something inside me.

Without thinking, I stepped forward and wrapped my arms around her. For a moment, she went still—then she held me back, tighter than I remembered her ever doing.

Her perfume was the same as it had always been—white lilies and faint sandalwood—and beneath it, something more primal: the soft hum of her wolf, calm and maternal.

Alina purred against it.

"Oh, I missed you, Sera," my mother whispered.

"I missed you, too," I murmured against her shoulder.

When she pulled back, her eyes were damp but shining. "I-I hope we can get closer," she said, brushing a hand along my cheek. "Bridge the gap. No more distance. No more enmity."

I nodded, though I knew how fragile promises could be in our family. "I'd like that," I said softly.

She smiled, fastening the bracelet around my wrist. The gold caught the late-afternoon light, glinting like a promise that might, hopefully, hold.