

My Sister 216

Chapter 216 STRONG ROOTS

SERAPHINA'S POV

Dinner passed in a strange, fragile quiet.

Not tense, just...careful. Like we were all trying very hard not to break something delicate.

As usual, Daniel talked the most, excitedly recounting the game, his fork moving more than he actually ate.

Kieran listened, nodding, answering when spoken to. Every now and then, I caught his eyes drifting to me—quick, unreadable glances that made something tighten low in my belly.

I kept my voice steady. Focused on Daniel. On the food. On breathing.

Daniel finished first, dropping his fork with a soft clang. "That was amazing, Mom," he announced, sitting back with a satisfied sigh.

"Thanks," I said, smiling. "Do you want dessert?"

He threw his arms up in a theatrical yawn. “Actually, I’m pretty beat,” he said, rubbing his eyes. “I’m gonna head to bed.”

I held back an eyeroll. Sure.

“Alright, baby.” I leaned over and kissed his hair. “Brush your teeth.”

He hopped out of his seat and hesitated—just for a second—before he stepped round to Kieran’s side and hugged him around the shoulders.

“Thanks for playing with me today, Dad.”

Kieran’s hand came up, strong and steady, resting against his son’s back. “Anytime, Danny. Thanks for inviting me.”

When Daniel padded upstairs, only the two of us remained—and the quiet immediately grew teeth.

I stood, reaching for the plates. “I’ll...uh...get this cleaned up.”

Kieran rose as well. “Let me help.”

Exhaustion dulled my instinct to refuse.

I was too tired to argue. Too raw from Ashar's confession. Too aware of the way Daniel had watched us both during dinner, hope stitched into every glance.

"Okay."

Kieran's eyes briefly met mine—surprised, almost tentative—and then softened. He stepped beside me, wordless but intent.

We moved in silence, passing plates, stacking dishes, brushing fingertips once or twice. I didn't flinch. He didn't retreat.

Outside, the wind shifted through the trees. Inside, water rushed softly, cutlery chimed.

It was domestic. Simple. Ordinary.

And somehow, unbearably intimate.

It took every ounce of willpower I had not to keep glancing at his chest where the injury was.

When I returned with the medical kit, he took it with mumbled thanks and disappeared into the downstairs bathroom.

Not knowing if Ashar had listened to me and started healing him or not was killing me.

When we finished, Kieran slowly dried his hands, as if unsure what to do next. Unspoken words hovered like ghosts between us.

“Thank you for dinner. It was delicious.” He spoke like a customer complimenting a chef at a restaurant.

“You’re welcome.” Unlike the hypothetical chef, I didn’t tell him to ‘please come again.’

He cleared his throat once and glanced behind me. “I should...”

I nodded. “Yep, of course.” I stepped aside.

My breath caught ever so slightly when he walked past me, and I didn’t move until I heard the front door click shut behind him.

Silence blanketed the house, thick and heavy—its weight sinking into me, full of waiting, like the air before a storm.

But for once, this particular brand of silence didn't hurt.

It just...was.

I cleaned up a bit more before heading upstairs.

Daniel was already in bed, but wide awake. He looked up at me with a smile as I walked in, as if he'd been waiting for me.

"Pretty beat, huh?" I raised a brow.

His grin widened. "I was just thinking about earlier. The rink."

I smiled faintly, coming to sit beside him. "You had fun, didn't you?"

"Yeah!" That one word carried so much warmth, it softened the ache that pressed at my chest after the conversation with Ashar.

"It's been so long since I played hockey with Dad. I almost forgot how fast he is." His eyes brightened at the memory. "Did you see the way he blocked Maxwell's shot? He didn't even look like he was trying!"

I laughed softly. “I did see. I was terrified one of you would crash into the boards and get hurt, though.”

“Dad would never let that happen.”

The sheer, unwavering confidence in that simple sentence made me pause.

For all of Kieran’s flaws—his stubborn pride, his silence, his past mistakes—I was glad he hadn’t failed our son irreparably.

“I wonder when we can play like that again,” Daniel said wistfully.

I shifted closer on the bed and squeezed his knee above the blanket. “You don’t have to wonder, hon. You could just ask him.”

Daniel glanced up, startled. “I can?”

“Of course. You don’t have to wait for special occasions. And you certainly don’t have to sneak around my back to call him.” He smiled sheepishly as I continued, “If you want to skate or train with him or just hang out, all you have to do is ask. I’m sure he’d be thrilled.”

Daniel shook his head, his expression shuttering. "Dad's busy. He's Alpha. He has to train the warriors, and handle the pack council, and..." He hesitated, lowering his gaze. "And I'm supposed to help someday. Not distract him."

My heart twisted. He was only nine—too young to be worrying about responsibilities that heavy.

I cupped his face and tilted it up gently so our eyes met. "Daniel," I said softly. "Do you really think spending time with you is a distraction?"

He frowned, uncertain. "Isn't it?"

"No," I said firmly. "Your dad works hard, yes—but that doesn't mean he doesn't want to be your dad too. That game today? He enjoyed every minute of it, trust me."

His eyes held a mix of skepticism and hopefulness.

"Did you see his smile, baby?" I continued. "Not the polite, reserved kind he uses for work or appearances but the real one—the one he shows when he's truly happy." I poked his middle fondly. "When he's with you."

Daniel's face softened, but he still looked conflicted. "He didn't smile like that before. Not when we all lived together."

I swallowed hard. The truth in his words stung more than I wanted to admit.

“No,” I whispered. “He didn’t. But people change. Sometimes it just takes them a while to remember what matters.”

After talking to Ashar earlier, I was starting to believe that more and more.

Daniel studied me for a moment, like he was weighing my words. “You think Dad misses us?”

Us. The word wrapped itself around my heart like a vine.

“I think,” I said slowly, “that no matter what’s happened between your dad and me, he’ll always miss you when he’s not here. You’re his son. And you can call him, or see him, or invite him to play anytime you want.”

My thumb gently stroked his cheeks. “Don’t ever think you have to hold back for my sake.”

He blinked up at me. “But won’t you feel lonely if I spend more time with him?”

That question hit me harder than I expected. For years, Daniel had been my anchor, the one constant in a world that often felt cruelly uncertain.

But I couldn't let him carry my loneliness. That wasn't his burden to bear.

I leaned forward and pressed my lips lightly to his forehead. "You don't have to worry about me, love," I whispered against his skin. "I'll be just fine. You're allowed to love your dad and have fun with him. That's what families do."

He hesitated for a beat, then nodded, though his eyes shone with something deep and unspoken. A few seconds later, he threw his arms around my neck and hugged me tight.

I wrapped my arms around him just as tight. "What's this for?" I murmured against his shoulder.

He didn't let go. "I don't know if you know this," he said into my hair, "but you're so much stronger now. Like a big tree that doesn't fall even when it rains a lot."

My breath caught. "A tree?" I repeated, half laughing.

He pulled back just enough to look at me seriously. "Yeah. You know—strong roots and stuff. You don't waver anymore. Even when people are mean to you. You even made up with Grandma."

I smiled softly, blinking away the sudden sting in my eyes. "You noticed that?"

He smiled, eyes crinkling in a way that reminded me of Kieran. “I want to be like you when I grow up.”

The words undid me.

For a moment, I could only stare at him—the boy who’d seen me at my weakest, who’d been the reason I’d found the strength to stand again.

I reached out and pulled him close, pressing a kiss to his hair.

“Who you are now is already pretty amazing,” I whispered.

He hummed contentedly, and for a while, we just stayed like that, our steady breaths filling the silence.

I let his words root themselves in me, steady and sure. I was a tree, unwavering in the face of past storms.

And I knew—even if the storm returned, I wouldn’t break.