

My Sister 272

Chapter 272 A STRIKING PAIR

SERAPHINA'S POV

The house was already awake when Corin and I came back in, salt clinging to my skin, damp curls escaping my braid, and bare feet tracking sand across the floor.

I was bone-tired, muscles aching in a way that promised consequences later, yet my mind sparkled, startlingly clear, as if someone had switched on a light within me.

Sunlight poured through the tall windows in pale golden sheets, catching dust motes and transforming them into tiny, swirling confetti.

The scent of breakfast—warm bread, citrus, rich coffee—wrapped around me as I crossed the threshold, grounding in a way that made the night feel suddenly unreal.

Corin and I hadn't spoken much on the walk back. Not because there was nothing to say, but because we'd both spent everything we had.

Words felt like an unnecessary strain after hours of focus, control, and truths laid bare.

That quiet did not last.

Five pairs of eyes snapped up the moment we entered the dining room.

Wide. Bright. Alert.

And unmistakably curious.

Dora froze mid-bite, a piece of bread hovering halfway to her mouth. Neri's gaze flicked from Corin to me and back again, her lips pressing together as if physically restraining a smile.

Reef leaned so far over the table I was half convinced he was about to topple into his chair, while Kai—ever composed—lifted his mug and watched us over the rim with open, unapologetic curiosity.

At the head of the table, Selene sat perfectly at ease, one leg crossed over the other, coffee cradled in both hands as she observed the scene with quiet, unmistakable interest.

I slowed and said cautiously, "Good morning."

Corin cleared his throat, eyeing his nieces and nephews suspiciously. "Morning, guys."

No one answered.

Dora's eyes narrowed. Slowly. Calculating.

"You were gone this morning when I went to your room," she said to me, accusation seeping into her voice. "I thought I dreamed you."

I offered her an apologetic smile. "I'm sorry, hon. I couldn't sleep and—"

Then she gasped. "You stayed up all night."

I blinked. "I—"

"With Uncle Corin," she added, delighted.

The room erupted.

Neri slapped a hand over her mouth. Reef slammed both palms onto the table. Kai choked on his drink.

I stopped dead. "Wait—what do you think happened?"

Dora slid off her chair and marched toward me with purpose, planting her hands on her hips in a way that was impressively authoritative for someone her size. “Are you going to get married?”

My jaw unhinged.

Corin made a strangled sound beside me.

“I—no,” I said, far too quickly, my gaze darting to Corin’s. “Absolutely not.”

Reef frowned. “Why not?”

“Because...because—” I waved a hand helplessly. “That’s not—he’s—”

I faltered and shot Selene a pleading look, silently begging her to intervene, to redirect, to parent.

She met my gaze over the rim of her coffee cup, eyes dancing with unmistakable amusement—and did absolutely nothing.

What the hell was going on?

“Is it because you’re older?” Neri supplied helpfully.

I opened my mouth. Closed it. Opened it again. That was just one out of a hundred reasons, but I would take the escape route. “Yes. Exactly. Thank you.”

“That’s not a problem,” Reef interrupted cheerfully. “Mom’s older than Dad.”

Selene lowered her coffee cup enough to show the curve of her lips. “By several months,” she said serenely.

Neri nodded enthusiastically. “Age gaps are normal. Especially for powerful people.”

Corin shot her a look. “Where did you hear that?”

She shrugged. “Books.”

His eyes narrowed as he muttered, “Dangerous things.”

Heat crawled up my neck. “For the record,” I said, trying to regain control of the situation, “I have never once thought of Corin in that way.”

Corin glanced at me, brows lifting faintly. “Good to know.”

“That didn’t come out right,” I said quickly.

Dora fluttered her eyelashes. “Uh-oh. Please don’t break my uncle’s heart, Aunty Sera.”

My lips parted. “No—I—”

Kai set his mug down with deliberate care. “Enough,” he said, tone gentle but firm. “You’re embarrassing her.”

I could have hugged him.

Dora looked at her older brother, torn. “But—”

“Your hot chocolate’s getting cold,” Kai continued smoothly. “Eat. Everyone.”

The children groaned in unison, but the intensity eased. Reef slumped back into his chair, muttering something about adults ruining everything.

Neri resumed braiding Dora's hair with exaggerated focus, though the occasional grin still slipped through.

Corin leaned closer to me, voice low. "For what it's worth, I've never once thought of you that way, either."

"Thank you," I murmured fervently.

Selene finally looked up then, her gaze flicking between us with unmistakable amusement. "For what it's worth, you do make a striking pair," she said lightly.

I groaned. "Don't you start."

She laughed. "Relax. I'm teasing."

Breakfast settled into something closer to normal after that—if normal included Dora shooting me sly glances and Reef whispering exaggerated theories about secret midnight vows.

Corin bore it with impressive stoicism, only occasionally swatting Neri's hand when she tried to poke him for reactions.

By the time plates were cleared and the children were herded off to get ready for the day, my nerves had finally stopped buzzing.

Selene poured two cups of fresh coffee and handed me one, gesturing toward the terrace.

“Walk with me?” she asked.

Outside, crisp air filled our lungs, the sea unfurling endlessly ahead. The morning sun had yet to chase away the last wisps of mist, and the world felt hushed, kind of dreamy.

We sat with our cups warming our hands.

“I wanted to ask you something,” Selene said after a moment.

I glanced at her, my eyes narrowed. “About Corin?”

Her smile widened. “No. Though that was entertaining.”

I snorted. “Please don’t encourage them.”

"I won't," she promised, then sobered. "What I wanted to ask you is about Seabreeze."

I waited.

"You've seen our pack," she continued. "You've felt the land, the sea. I'd like to know what you think."

"I love it here," I said honestly. "It's...open. Alive. No one's holding their breath."

Relief flickered across her features, immediately followed by a hope I dreaded having to dim.

"But," I added gently, "I'm not planning to join."

Her relief melted away, leaving behind a wistful longing.

"I thought as much," she said quietly.

"My roots are elsewhere," I explained. "This place is wonderful, don't get me wrong. But it isn't home."

Selene nodded, staring out at the horizon. "A pity. You would fit in perfectly here."

I offered a rueful smile. "Part of me wants to believe that, but another part knows this is just a stop along my journey, not my destination."

She chuckled. "Maybe I should encourage Corin to pursue you seriously, and then you'll become family and stay."

I sputtered on my coffee. "Selene—"

"I'm joking," she said, laughing outright now. "Mostly."

I shook my head. "You really are terrible."

"And you are special," she said, sobering again. "In ways even you don't fully see yet."

My cheeks heated. "Corin said that too."

She smiled softly. "You two may not be romantically inclined, but I've never seen Corin connect with someone as well and quickly as he did with you."

"Yeah?"

She nodded. "He doesn't reveal his heritage lightly, and he certainly doesn't Shift in front of just anyone. That kind of trust isn't meaningless."

Warmth bloomed in my chest.

"I'm glad he found the strength to share his truth with you," Selene added, her gaze dimming slightly, "that same heritage has made things...complicated for him."

I turned fully toward her. "How so?"

She hesitated, then sighed. "Even in the supernatural world, there are levels to what people consider 'normal,' and they fear what they don't understand. Even within Seabreeze. Even within family."

I cocked my head. "And for you? It couldn't just have been hard for Corin."

I expected Selene's guard to rise at the broaching of such a sensitive topic, but she just shrugged, her gaze tracing the horizon wistfully.

"I like to think we've evolved since then, especially since Adrian became Alpha."

Her lips curled at the mention of her mate. "It wasn't easy, but I wouldn't change a single thing."

Sensing the story, I waited.

“You know, we weren’t fated mates,” Selene began softly.

The words surprised me more than I expected. I thought back to the way Adrian looked at her, the way his eyes always drew to her, tracking her every moment like she was his center of gravity.

“Adrian and I grew up together,” she continued. “Childhood friends. Sparring partners. He was always there—every bruise, every failure. Because I was the most balanced out of my siblings and the oldest, my father pushed me the hardest, training me like an Alpha. And when things got hard, Adrian was the one who was always by my side, reminding me that I was much more than a bridge or heir.”

She smiled faintly at the memory.

“I hoped,” she admitted, “that he was my mate. I really, really did.”

My chest tightened. I wrapped both hands around my coffee cup, letting the warmth seep into my palms as I waited. Selene wasn’t a woman who needed prompting. When she was ready, she spoke.

“But fate,” she said, lips curving into a smile that reached her eyes, “had other ideas.”