

My Sister 28

Chapter 28 WORTH CELEBRATING

SERAPHINA'S POV

The training room clock had long since blurred into meaningless numbers. Hours? Minutes? Time didn't matter—only the burn in my muscles, the raw ache of my knuckles, the way my lungs screamed for air but got none.

Each jab carried Celeste's sneer: "You're not worth the effort."

Every hook bore Kieran's venom: "You never mattered."

I hit harder. Faster. Letting the pain overwrite them like a virus corrupting old files.

If I stopped, even for a second, I'd hear them. I'd feel the stabbing agony of their words.

I couldn't afford that. If I let the words sink in, they would take root. Grow branches. Vines. Wrap around me and choke me from within—

"Damn, what did that poor dummy ever do to you?"

I startled, whipping around to find Maya by the door, just like she'd been the first day we met.

I was panting so hard, I couldn't answer her, and that split second of distraction brought the venom back.

'You were a mistake, Sera.'

I spun back around and continued to attack the sparring dummy. It didn't have a face, but Celeste's and Kieran's kept flashing on the blank canvas, and I hit even harder.

I didn't know when Maya moved, but the next thing I knew, she had a firm grip on my wrist, pausing my swing.

"You're going to break your wrists if you keep going like that," she said. "And you'll burn out."

For a moment, I just stood there, fighting to catch my breath, debating whether struggling against her when I knew I was going to lose was worth it.

Finally, I staggered back, and Maya released me as I slumped down to the mat.

She sank, too, with a lot more grace than I could ever muster. She wordlessly handed me a water bottle.

The sound of me greedily chugging the contents of the bottle filled the room, and when I was done, I felt slightly better.

'Every time I touched you, I pretended you were her.'

I closed my eyes, fighting the urge to scream. Anything to drown out the fucking noise.

"Come on." I looked up to see that Maya was standing again. She had a hand stretched out to me.
"We're getting a drink."

I shook my head. "I'm not in the mood."

She crouched, her brown eyes pinning me. "When your trainer tells you to do something, what is your reply?"

I rolled my eyes, remembering the first rule she drilled into me during our first session. "Maya, this isn't—"

"What. Is. Your. Reply?"

I sighed. "Yes, Miss Cartridge."

Her lips twitched, and she held her hand out. "Let's go."

"I smell," I complained weakly.

She wrinkled her nose like she'd just noticed. "You're right. You do."

She wiggled her hand impatiently, and I finally took it, letting her pull me to my feet.

We sat outside on the patio behind the OTS dorms. Maya procured a fancy bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon, which we sipped from plastic cups from the cafeteria, watching the sky deepen into dusk as a cool breeze brushed against our skin.

The silence wasn't uncomfortable—it was actually kind of nice.

Until Maya broke it. "So, wanna tell me why you're attempting to murder yourself and a sparring dummy on your day off?"

I exhaled, staring down into my cup. I twirled it slightly in my hand, watching the liquid slosh around.

"It's a long story," I said softly.

She leaned back, folding her arms. "Then you're lucky I'm a good listener."

I shook my head. "I don't—"

"Your trainer just told you to do something, Sera."

I looked up at her. Though she had on her usual stern countenance, her eyes held a softness I'd never seen before.

"Yes, Miss Cartridge."

The words tumbled out of me—halting at first, then fast and uncontrollable.

I told her everything.

The mistake I made ten years ago. The night I let my guard down, lost my inhibitions, and committed an irreversible mistake. The punishment that came after—how my family shunned me, how I was branded a disgrace. How I spent the last ten years—alone, unloved, worthless.

I told her about Celeste's return, about how I'd somehow remained the villain in their story even after the divorce.

I didn't dare look at her when I finished.

I didn't know Maya all that well, but she struck me as a disciplined person. Someone upright who valued honesty and hated weakness. I expected her to flinch, to withdraw, to look at me with the same disdain I'd received my whole life.

But she didn't.

She just let out a soft sigh and said, "You've been through hell."

I blinked, my gaze darting to her.

"Of course you've made mistakes, Sera. Who hasn't?" she continued. "But being wolfless—that wasn't your fault. And that one night? Last I checked, it takes at least two people to have sex, and unless you're Mary, you didn't make Daniel all by yourself."

I huffed a weak laugh at that.

Maya placed a hand on my shoulder and squeezed. "I'm sorry you were let down. I'm sorry you're hurting."

I opened my mouth, but no words came. I hadn't been expecting this level of sympathy, and I didn't know what to do with it.

There was pressure building in my eyes, and I was horrified that I might cry in front of Maya.

"I just wish Lucian and I had met you sooner," she said softly. "If you'd been brought into OTS back then, maybe you wouldn't have had to endure all that alone."

Yep—I was going to cry.

Maya once again surprised me by pulling me into her arms. She held me as I wept, and I clung to her like a lifeline.

The tears flowed out of me unabated, but instead of my heartache growing, it felt like the pain was ebbing.

Like the tears were washing it all away. Suddenly, I felt less pathetic, less broken. Understood.

Maya's words replaced Celeste's and Kieran's.

Everyone made mistakes, but the punishment I'd suffered had far outweighed the crime, and I was done serving it.

I was done letting Kieran and Celeste poison my life with their toxicity.

I woke up the next morning with a kind of clarity I hadn't felt in years.

It felt like the weight of guilt and regret I'd carried around for ten years had been lifted. I felt lighter, an actual spring in my step.

It was time to move forward—for me, and for Daniel.

Training was better. I felt less inclined to decapitate the innocent sparring dummy, and I think my tears had softened Maya because she went easier on me than usual. Not that I was complaining.

Still, Maya's version of easy had me collapsing to the floor when we were done, struggling to breathe.

My vision swam as she waved something in my field of vision.

I frowned, grabbing the flyer.

"What's this?"

"A trial for all OTS rookies," she said. "It's in three months. It's a critical test to evaluate your progress."

I sat up. "And you want me to participate?"

She nodded. "Lucian thinks so, too."

"But—" My mouth was suddenly dry. The other rookies had been training longer than I had. Most of them had wolves, which was a given advantage.

Maya nudged my knee with her boot. "Get out of that head. If I didn't think you'd be ready in three months, I wouldn't ask you to do it."

She cocked her head. "But I am—asking you to do it."

A small smile spread on my face. If Maya and Lucian thought I could do it, then I probably could.

It struck me that I had more people in my corner than I initially thought. Lucian, Maya, Daniel.

Daniel...

Oh, he'd be so proud of me if I did well.

That cemented my decision, and I looked up at Maya. "Yes, Miss Cartridge."

She returned my smile and tilted her head towards the door. "Now go hit the showers."

I pushed myself to my feet and headed out.

I frowned when I saw that the light in the hallway was off. I felt my way to the common area I had to pass to get to the locker rooms.

Just as I stepped in, the lights clicked on, momentarily blinding me with their sudden intensity.

"Happy birthday, Sera!"

I staggered backward, stunned, taking in the room—confetti, balloons, streamers, an actual banner with my name on it.

Some of the rookies were grinning like idiots, Lucian was holding a cake, and Maya appeared from behind me, throwing her arm around my shoulder.

"Happy birthday, Sera." She beamed at me.

I blinked slowly, my heart clenching in my chest.

I rarely celebrated my birthday. My birth nearly killed my mother, and my father never let me forget that. He'd scowl every year when the date came around and saw any form of celebration as a personal affront.

And after I got married... Well, let's just say birthdays were the last thing on anyone's mind.

Only Daniel ever remembered.

So when my phone buzzed earlier today with a birthday greeting, I thought it was from Daniel.

However, when I checked... it wasn't.

It was from Kieran.

"Happy birthday. Hope you're well."

I stared at the message for a long moment, strangely numb. Then I locked the screen without replying.

And now, I pushed that thought out of my mind, determined not to let Kieran pop the balloon of happiness swelling inside me.

For once, I was surrounded by people who actually cared. People who chose me—not out of obligation, but out of respect.

And this year, for the first time in a long, long time, I felt like there was actually something worth celebrating.

I was someone worth celebrating.