

## My Sister 301

Chapter 301 SHAME ON ME

SERAPHINA'S POV

Training might not yet have delivered the perfect results I wanted, but I improved with each session, and it left me thrumming with satisfaction—especially the physical aspect.

My last session at OTS still lingered in my body, the memory of it settling into my muscles like a warm echo. That low, humming ache that meant I'd pushed hard enough to matter.

Smooth.

That was the word Maya had used earlier, arms folded as she observed my footwork with a sharp, appraising eye.

"Your transitions are smoother," she'd said. "Less resistance."

Less resistance.

I hadn't realized how much of it I'd been carrying until it loosened its grip, as if something unknotted after being pulled too tight for too long.

Even now, clean and wrapped in fresh clothes, my body felt perfectly aligned—present, steady. I relished not feeling like the ground beneath me was waiting to give way.

Daniel didn't miss my good mood.

When I walked into his room, he looked up from where he was crouched on the floor, carefully arranging his boots beside his backpack with military precision, his brow furrowing.

Then he grinned.

"You're humming," he said.

I froze mid-step. "And? Is that a bad thing?"

He shook his head, his smile widening. "Not one bit. I like it when you're happy."

I moved over to him and ruffled his hair, leaning down to place a kiss on his temples. "Thank you, my love. Are you all set?"

He zipped his backpack. With his things now divided between my place and Kieran's, all he ever needed was a single bag of essentials for his back-and-forth.

“Yep,” he said, then paused. “Are you sure you don’t want to come with? I don’t want you spending New Year’s on your own.”

I shook my head. “Don’t worry about me, baby. I won’t be alone.”

His eyes narrowed. “Who will you be with?”

I shrugged. “Someone.”

He rose to his feet, hands on his hips, dark eyes gleaming with curiosity. “Do you have a date with Uncle Lucian tonight?”

I choked on my laugh. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me.”

I flicked his forehead lightly. “Mind your own business.”

He laughed, darting out of reach. “I knew it.”

Just then, the doorbell chimed through the house.

He let out an excited squeal. "That's grandma."

"Shoes," I reminded him.

He jammed his feet into his boots as I grabbed his backpack and swung it over my shoulder.

"Easy," I called out as he bounded down the stairs, two at a time.

At the foot of the stairs, he froze. "I forgot Wolfy."

I ruffled his hair. "Big bad Alpha heir still needs his stuffed wolf?"

He shot me a miffed look and raced back up the stairs.

I laughed on my way to the door, already forming a greeting for Leona.

But the greeting died on my tongue.

Because it was Kieran who stood in the doorway.

For a heartbeat, time stilled, the world narrowing to the space between us.

This was the first time I'd seen him since rejecting the bond.

I'd imagined how it would feel a dozen times. Maybe the ache and fever would return. Maybe there would be some animosity. Probably some awkwardness.

I had even imagined that maybe I hadn't severed it right, and echoes of the bond would remain.

But no pain lanced through my chest. No answering pull sang beneath my skin. The silence where the bond had once lived was absolute.

And yet—

My heart kicked hard against my ribs.

He looked different.

Not the brash dominance that had once wrapped around him like armor.

Not the cold indifference I'd spent a decade trying to thaw.

Not the raw, haunted edges he'd worn in the aftermath of everything we'd broken.

A gentleness radiated from him now, a quiet steadiness that softened the hard lines I remembered and made it impossible to look away.

His shoulders were relaxed, no longer braced for battle, and the tension that had once lived between his brows was gone.

His eyes were still sharp, still unmistakably Kieran's—but warm, unburdened, and when he smiled, it tugged faint lines into their corners, transforming his handsome face into something that made my breath catch.

“Hi, Sera.”

The rich timbre of his voice snapped me back into myself, and that was when I realized I'd been staring, frozen.

“Um...hi,” I managed.

His gaze darted behind me. “Is Daniel ready?”

“Yeah.” I nodded, a little too enthusiastically. “He’s just getting Wolfy.”

Kieran nodded and held a hand out for the backpack.

I handed it over, and our fingers brushed in the exchange.

Nothing sparked.

No electricity. No magnetic pull.

Just warmth.

And an utterly inconvenient flush that crept up my neck and into my cheeks.

I ducked my head instantly, thankful for the curtain of hair that fell forward to hide the redness.

If Kieran noticed, he didn't show it.

He simply straightened, slinging the bag over his shoulder like it weighed nothing.

A beat of the predicted awkwardness passed, and I turned, frowning.

Why was it taking Daniel so long to retrieve the stuffed animal that slept on his pillow in plain sight?

Kieran cleared his throat. "Just in case you were wondering about the New Year Schedule—there's a bonfire at dusk, then sparring demonstrations once it's fully dark. The elders will give the year's address after that, followed by the feast. There's a junior obstacle course that Daniel's pretty excited about. Fireworks at midnight, then the moon run."

I managed a smile. "Sounds like fun."

He hesitated, then added, "There's also the Hunting Festival next week, and if you're available...I wanted to invite you."

I couldn't mask my surprise.

It was one thing to be so uncharacteristically calm and composed, but casually inviting me to a pack event like nothing had broken between us?

“I—Is that a good idea?”

He lifted one shoulder in a small shrug. “You asked me to prove my love for you without the bond in place, right?”

I stared at him.

Kieran smiled. “I don’t intend to overwhelm you or make you uncomfortable. This is just a gentleman inviting the lady he fancies to an event. No pressure. And,” he added carefully, his voice tightening ever so slightly, “if you want, you’re welcome to bring your own...companion. You’d both be Nightfang’s honored guests.”

I blinked.

Magnanimous. Considerate. Disarmingly sincere.

I searched for a reason to refuse and found none.

“I’ll...think about it,” I said finally.

He nodded once. “That’s all I ask.”

Finally, Daniel’s footsteps bounded down the stairs.

“Dad!”

Kieran’s attention shifted, his expression softening as he crouched to Daniel’s level. “Ready, bud?”

“Yep!”

Kieran straightened and looked back at me.

“Bye, Sera.”

“Bye, Mom!” Daniel called, already halfway down the steps.

“Have fun!” I called out after him.

Kieran paused at the car, glancing back at me. For a moment, something indecipherable passed between us.

And then they were gone.

Only when I took a long, deep breath did I realize how shallow my breathing had become.

I stood in the doorway for a long time after they'd left, replaying the brief interaction with Kieran, unable to reconcile the calm, easy-going man who had stood at my door with any other version of him I'd known prior.

The imprint of his presence was still faintly there—an ease I couldn't quite place, let alone explain. The calm, the polite respect, the absence of everything that had once hurt.

I'd thought that after severing the bond, the only other connection I would have with Kieran would be Daniel. I thought I'd hurt him so bad that he wouldn't want anything more to do with me.

'You asked me to prove my love for you without the bond in place, right?'

I cupped my still-warm cheeks, biting my lower lip as my heart fluttered.

It didn't stop fluttering, even as I got ready to meet Lucian.

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Stand me up once, shame on you. Stand me up twice, shame on me.

I stared at Lucian's text on my phone, which had come in after an hour of waiting, till the words blurred.

Lucian: I'm sorry, Sera. Something came up. I can't make it tonight. We'll reschedule.

I tried to convince myself it was fine.

Lucian wasn't careless. He wasn't cruel. He wasn't the kind of man who broke a promise without reason.

Whatever was so important and urgent justified the pattern that was beginning to form.

Each disappointment alone was small, forgivable. But together, they became something heavier—a subtle accumulation that pressed against my ribs with an ache that was becoming all too familiar.

The problem wasn't that he kept going AWOL.

It was that I never knew why.

No context. No explanation. Only apologies and more promises waiting to be broken.

I had opened my world to him. I'd let him see the soft, unarmored places—the hope, the possibility, the way I was learning to want again without fear.

I had told him things I didn't share lightly. Trusted him with parts of me I had once locked away to survive.

And yet, he never quite stepped fully into that space with me.

There was always a door he kept closed. Always something unnamed that took precedence. A life I could sense but not touch.

I swallowed hard.

I refused to slowly shrink myself into quiet acceptance, to tell myself that wanting clarity made me unreasonable, that asking to be met fully was asking for too much.

I refused to repeat a despair I had barely survived once.

‘Don’t bother,’ I typed, fingers steady despite the ache in my chest. ‘Your actions speak loud and clear.’

I sent it before doubt could catch up to me, before hope could argue back.

Outside, the night air was sharp and clean. I drew it in, willing my shoulders to loosen.

I wasn’t the woman who cried quietly in empty rooms anymore, waiting for a love that didn’t deserve her.

Even if perfect love eluded me, I still had bright, beautiful things worth living for.

As if on cue, my phone buzzed, the brightest, most beautiful reason lighting up the screen.

Smiling, I lifted it—and froze.

The air shifted.

A pressure brushed my awareness, cold and eerie, like icy claws tracing my spine.

Every sense sharpened as the world tilted toward something unseen—and dangerous.