

My Sister 31

Chapter 31 TRASH IN SILK

SERAPHINA'S POV

Daniel's face lit up the moment the video connected. Just seeing him grinning like that filled my chest with something warm and bubbly.

"Mom! Happy birthday!"

I beamed. "Thank you, my love."

He briefly disappeared from the screen and returned with a large cardboard with 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY MOM!' designed with sparkly markers and little cartoon caricatures I assumed were me.

My eyes watered as he said, "Grandma said I couldn't send it to you for security reasons."

"That's okay, Danny. I love it, thank you."

"You look great," he beamed, and then his eyes widened. "What are you wearing?"

I held the phone out so he could see properly. "They're my training clothes."

It was a sleek, black tactical set with silver rune detailing and armored accents. Complete with fingerless gloves, combat boots, and a cropped leather jacket I never actually wore to train.

I thought it was a bit of overkill, but Maya said the first step to feeling like a badass was to dress like one.

"Woah!" Daniel gawked, his eyes wide in a way that made me swell with pride. "You look like an action hero."

I laughed. "That's a bit of a stretch."

"So tell me," he said. "Did you have a good birthday?"

I smiled, glancing at the pile of flowers and gifts on my bed. I tilted the camera so Daniel could see. "I did. My friends threw me a surprise party."

He gasped in delight. "Friends?"

I laughed. "Don't sound so surprised."

He shook his head. "No, I just..." His smile was so wide it crinkled his eyes shut, pure joy lighting up his face. "I'm so glad you have friends, Mom. You deserve that."

I smiled. "Thank you, baby."

His smile faded slightly. "I wish I could have been there, though. We're always together on your birthday."

"Oh, baby. I wish you were here too." He always made my birthday slightly less miserable.

"But I'll be back soon," he said. "Right?"

Gods, I hoped so.

I nodded. "Sooner than you think. I can't wait."

"Uhm..." I debated whether the topic I was about to broach was a good idea, but decided to go ahead anyway.

"Have you... spoken to your dad?"

Daniel's smile immediately faded, and he looked away without answering.

I sighed. No matter what went on between me and Kieran, I didn't want my son harboring resentment towards his dad.

Kieran might have been a distant husband and an even worse ex, but he was a good father, recent actions notwithstanding.

"Honey," I said softly. "You should talk with your dad, okay? He loves you, and he's super sorry about missing the PTC."

He looked back at me, and I hated that his bright countenance had dulled. "Did he even wish you a happy birthday? I told him he has to treat you better."

I blinked, processing his words.

So that was why Kieran sent that message. It hadn't come from remorse or sentiment—it was to look good in Daniel's eyes.

"He did text. He wished me a happy birthday," I said gently, stamping the resentment that suddenly rose in me.

The confrontation was none of his business. He didn't need to know about Kieran's cruel words or how Celeste ripped into me yet again.

Daniel didn't need that weight on his little shoulders.

The tension in his face eased. "Okay, good. I'm glad he did. Maybe I'll talk to him again."

I smiled softly. "That's a good idea. I'm proud of you, baby."

"So tell me more about your party!" he said, his excitement returning.

We spoke for a while longer before finally hanging up after he promised to call Kieran again.

I snuggled into my pillows, a contented smile on my face. It had been a good day. A really, really good day.

A part of me was skeptical. I knew I deserved happiness, but was I truly allowed?

The doorbell rang through the house, breaking me out of my reverie.

Something twisted in my belly as I went down to answer the door. I swear, if Kieran or Celeste decided they wanted to pull any of their shit on my birthday—

Oh.

Maya stood on my porch in... a dress.

She always looked formidable in her training clothes, but in her halter dress, strappy sandals, and her curly hair in a wild afro around her head, she looked like a goddess.

She pushed her oversized sunglasses up on her head and grinned. "Hi, birthday girl."

My mouth opened, and an incredulous sound fell out.

"You ready for our big shopping spree?" she asked, eyes gleaming.

I blinked. "Shopping?"

She nodded. "Yep!"

I shook my head in disbelief. "But... why?"

She laughed. "Do friends need a reason to hang out? Do I need a reason to spoil my friend on her birthday?"

That word—friends—resonated within me like a gong.

As far as I was concerned, I exaggerated earlier for Daniel's benefit.

But hearing Maya call herself my friend had to be the best part of today.

When I was younger, back when she merely tolerated me as opposed to the scalding hatred she now bore for me, I was like... an accessory for Celeste.

I had no other friends, and after marriage, all I had was Daniel.

Maya gently flicked my forehead, snapping me back to the present. "We're going to have to do something about all this noise in your head," she tsked.

I couldn't help but smile. "Sorry, I just—"

"Yeah, yeah." She braced her hands on my shoulders and spun me around. "Go change!"

I rushed back inside the house, a giddy smile on my face.

"Where do you think you're going?"

I paused, blinking in confusion at the row of department stores in front of me—Macy's, Nordstrom, and Clarks.

They all had the things I needed—clothes, shoes, home essentials.

"Shopping?" My answer came out as a question because Maya was looking at me like I'd grown two horns.

She sighed in mild exasperation. "Oh, you clueless sweetheart."

She looped her arm through mine and tugged me in the opposite direction.

"Nope. Today isn't about utility. It's about indulgence. This way."

"But... I don't—"

The boutique she led me to was the kind of place I usually passed by without even looking in. Silks, sequins, and shoes that looked more like art than footwear. I hesitated in the doorway, but Maya tugged me forward.

"I don't need all this, Maya," I said, my eyes wide.

She rolled her eyes. "Actually, you do," she said matter-of-factly.

"I do?"

"For the gala," she said like it was obvious. "Lucian's hosting one in a few weeks. Formal dress, full glam." She gestured into the store with a flourish. "The works."

I started to protest. "Maya, I—this sounds expensive. I can't—"

She waved it off. "Lucian's covering it. Said it's your reward for surviving his sadistic training regimen." She winked. "And mine."

I wanted to keep protesting, but the smile she gave me was so disarming. I let her pull me into the explosion of sparkles and silk, my reservations dissolving with every glittering step.

At first, I felt ridiculous. The gowns clung too tightly, shimmered too brightly. But then I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror—wearing something backless and emerald green—and something stirred.

I looked... beautiful.

No one had ever cared to dress me like this before. I was never invited to balls or galas when I was with Kieran.

His family made sure I was tucked out of sight—an embarrassment, their secret shame.

But now? Now, I was being seen.

And I liked it. It felt so fucking amazing.

We had just finished our purchases—Maya insisting I take two gowns and four ridiculous pairs of heels I could barely walk in—when the day took an inevitable turn.

We ran into her.

Celeste was flanked by two shadows—I recognized them as Emma and Abby. Growing up, I'd mentally referred to them as Gretchen Wieners and Karen Smith because when all three of them were together, they reminded me of the plastics from the movie *Mean Girls*.

And Celeste, reprising her role as Regina George, looked us up and down with a sneer.

"Well, well, well." She glanced at the bags in our hands and scoffed. "Look who's playing dress up."

Emma smirked. "Doesn't matter what she wears, Celeste. Trash in silk is still trash."

I flinched, the comment hitting harder than it should have. Old reflexes kicked in, and I felt myself begin to shrink.

But Maya stepped forward, fire in her eyes, and suddenly, despite the dress and heels, she was my formidable trainer, the fiercest person I knew.

"Say that again," she hissed, her voice low. Dangerous. "But this time, to my face and see what happens."

Emma's eyes widened, and then she was the one shrinking, withering under Maya's glare.

Celeste didn't seem as fazed, but her laugh lacked its usual bite. "You think dressing her up changes anything? Kieran's already made his choice. I'm his Luna."

"Congrats," Maya said coolly. "What a world-altering achievement. You must be so proud. Would you like a cookie?" The way she said it made it sound like Celeste had drawn on the walls and was expecting praise.

Maya took a step back, standing at my side as Celeste bristled with barely contained anger.

My new friend slipped her arm in mine. "Come on, Sera," she said. "It's reeks of insecurity and desperation."

Celeste's eyes flashed, but she didn't say another word as Maya pulled me away.

I let her guide me forward, our heels clicking against the polished floor like punctuation marks.

I could feel the burn of glares on my back, but I didn't look back.

Celeste was where she belonged—behind me.