

My Sister 325

Chapter 325 CONTROL AND MANIPULATION

MARGARET'S POV

I ended the call with trembling fingers.

The screen went dark, reflecting a faint, distorted version of my own face at me—older, tighter around the eyes, the lines of composure pulled too thin to hold.

I lowered the phone and exhaled slowly, careful to keep my trembling hands steady, as if any sudden movement might shatter the fragile calm I had forced into place.

Then, I heard what had made me hang up in the first place: footsteps.

Soft. Unhurried. Purposeful.

I straightened immediately, smoothing my expression into something neutral as the sound approached the door.

I didn't need to look to know who it was. There was only one person in this place who walked with that particular blend of entitlement and familiarity.

A polite knock sounded, more perfunctory than respectful.

“Come in.”

The door to the guest suite opened, and Catherine stepped inside, carrying a porcelain tray balanced easily in her hands.

For a fleeting moment, I saw her as she used to be—my best friend, Edward’s confidante, the woman we once trusted without question.

Maybe it was the distance of all the years spent apart, but now, standing before me, she felt like a stranger wearing a familiar face.

Afternoon light followed her in, slanting across the marble floor and catching in the fine silver threads of her hair.

She wore pale linen today and the kind of effortless elegance that always made her look as though she belonged anywhere she stood.

“Tea,” she said pleasantly. “I thought you might like something warm after your call.”

I fought the urge to flinch as her eyes narrowed, lingering on the phone I'd just set down, her expression unreadable and tight.

I forced a small smile. "That's kind of you."

She crossed the room and set the tray down on the low table next to me, arranging the teacups with practiced grace. The scent of bergamot and something floral rose into the air.

"I heard you didn't touch your breakfast," she remarked lightly. "You really must take better care of yourself, Margaret."

I clasped my hands together to keep them from tightening into fists. "Have you seen Celeste today? I haven't seen her in a while." The question came out sharper than I intended.

Catherine paused, one delicate brow lifting as she turned to look at me.

"Celeste?" she echoed. "Oh, she left long before the storm hit."

"Where?" I pressed.

"The research facility," she said, pouring tea into one of the cups.

My unease deepened. "Despite the pending storm?"

Catherine shrugged, unconcerned. "You know Celeste. When she's focused on a project, very little else exists."

On the contrary, while she was growing up, I could never get Celeste to focus on just one thing. She easily got distracted and rarely completed any task she started.

"When will she be back?" I asked.

Catherine shrugged. "With the transportation system disrupted by the storm, who can tell?"

I gazed out the window at the sea beyond the resort grounds. It lay unnaturally calm now, smoothed into glass by the storm's passing.

The sky was bright again, washed clean and deceptively peaceful, but the air still felt charged, as if the island hadn't yet exhaled.

"She's barely been here," I murmured, more to myself than to Catherine. "I've been in the Maldives for weeks, and I've hardly seen my own daughter."

Catherine's lips curved faintly as she handed me a teacup. "Celeste has been very busy."

"That's what worries me," I continued, ignoring the cup. "This obsession with research. These...projects. She never cared about things like this before."

Catherine took a sip of her own tea, studying me over the rim. "People change."

"She's my daughter," I said tightly. "I would know if she was changing."

Catherine set her cup down. "Would you?"

The question landed softly. It cut all the same.

"Excuse me?"

"I care for Celeste no less than you do," Catherine went on, her tone gentle. "As her godmother, her well-being has always been important to me."

"Are you insinuating that it's not important to me?" I asked, arching a brow.

She smiled then—not warmly, but knowingly, as if she held a secret I wasn't privy to. "Important enough to understand her as well as I do?"

My heart gave a sharp, uncomfortable jolt. "What is that supposed to mean?"

Catherine tilted her head, considering me. "You've always had a habit of trying to protect everyone, Margaret. Especially your children. You spread yourself so thin in the process."

Her gaze sharpened. "But protection without clarity is just presented as control and manipulation. Sera would know."

"That's unfair," I snapped.

"Is it?" she countered calmly. "You wanted to shield Sera from the world, from the truth, from herself. And she ended up hating you for it."

The words struck harder than I expected. I felt them lodge somewhere deep in my chest, cold and immovable.

"Without my help, you might have lost her entirely. And now," Catherine continued, unfazed, "you look at me as if I'm the enemy. Just like Edward did."

My breath stilled. "Edward?"

Her smile turned brittle. “I served my purpose, and for over twenty years, you both ignored my existence. Imagine my surprise when he showed up at my door.”

“What did he want?” My voice barely held steady.

Catherine’s lip quirked. “Oh, now, if he didn’t feel the need to share with you, who am I to break his confidence?”

Try as she might, there was no hiding the bite in her words, which led me to believe that whatever had brought my Edward here hadn’t been good, and their interaction hadn’t ended well.

I closed my eyes briefly. I could imagine the scene all too clearly—Edward’s rigid posture, his righteous anger, his certainty that upfront confrontation could solve anything.

“He came to me with accusations,” Catherine said, confirming my suspicions. “With demands.” A soft laugh escaped her. “It didn’t go the way he hoped. He forgot that he has no authority here.”

When I opened my eyes, I softened my expression deliberately.

“I’m just...tired,” I said quietly. “Of watching my daughters drift further apart. Of feeling like I’m failing them both.”

Catherine's gaze lingered on me, assessing.

"I don't know how to reach Celeste anymore," I went on. "And Sera—she's finally coming into her own, but I worry what that means for the balance between them."

I let my shoulders slump, just enough. Vulnerability—real enough to be convincing, controlled enough to be useful.

Catherine's lips curved slowly, dark satisfaction glinting in her eyes.

"Seraphina performed remarkably well in LST, even with those...dangerous parts of her locked away."

My stomach turned to ice, a cold dread pulsing.

There was no way Catherine knew that the seal had been broken...right?

"You've always said sisters should support one another," she continued smoothly. "Perhaps now is the time for Sera to help her sister."

My heart skipped. "Help her...how?"

"Well," Catherine replied, folding her hands, "Celeste hasn't been herself lately. She's been...low. Losing one's wolf has a way of doing that."

The world seemed to tilt.

"She—what?" My voice was a hoarse rasp.

Catherine's eyes widened just a fraction, as if realizing she'd said more than intended.

"Oh, I didn't mean to slip. I believed Celeste would trust you enough to tell you as soon as you arrived."

I pressed my hands tighter together, mostly to hide them from shaking—and to stamp down the urge to reach out and scratch the pitying smile on Catherine's face.

"When did this happen?" I ground out.

"It was recent," she said smoothly. "Quite tragic, really."

I felt the blood run cold in my veins. Celeste. Wolfless. Panic rose, wild and insistent, as the implications spiraled, each more dire than the last.

“I had no idea,” I breathed.

“She must not have wanted to burden you,” Catherine said.

Or...perhaps she hadn't been allowed to.

Before I could fully process the gravity of this shocking news, my thoughts were interrupted by a sudden, sharp pull at the back of my mind, a familiar presence forcing its way through long-dormant channels.

‘Margaret.’

I stiffened.

Contrary to what Catherine thought, I hadn't arrived at the Maldives on my own. I had come with a small, discreet security team headed by Jonathan, Edward's former Gamma, who was still loyal to our family.

I'd quietly dispatched him weeks ago when I landed to keep an eye on Celeste when my unease had first taken root.

I'd trusted Catherine blindly before, and that had felt like a mistake for over twenty years. It was one I wouldn't make again.

'Report,' I responded silently.

'Celeste left the Maldives before the storm made landfall,' he reported urgently. 'We quietly traced her movements as you requested, but we lost her in the storm.'

My pulse thundered.

'Destination?' I demanded.

'Unknown,' he replied.

'Are you saying she's missing?'

There was a pause, and then: 'Unfortunately.'

The room swam. My knuckles whitened on the edge of the couch as I fought down a surge of panic.

Catherine was watching me closely now. "Margaret?"

I forced a breath. Smoothed my expression once more. Was she aware that Celeste had left the island? I couldn't tell, and there was no way I would divulge that information if she didn't.

"I need to rest," I said, my voice steady despite the chaos raging beneath it. "It seems this storm has unsettled more than just the weather."

Catherine studied me for a long moment, then inclined her head. "Of course."

As she turned toward the door, her voice drifted back to me, light and sharp all at once.

"I worry about you, Margaret. In trying to protect everyone...you may find you've protected no one at all."

The door closed softly behind her.

I stood alone, the weight of too many truths pressing in from all sides.

Celeste was missing.

Sera had awokened.

And the true storm was only just beginning.