

My Sister 36

Chapter 36 PRETTY FUCKING AMAZING

SERAPHINA'S POV

I woke with my mouth dry and my limbs heavy, like I'd been asleep for a thousand years, and barely managed to claw my way back into the world.

The faint scent of saffron and eucalyptus filled the air—soothing, grounding.

Not my apartment.

I blinked against the soft morning light streaming in through parted drapes and slowly sat up, clutching the edge of the couch. I recognized that scent, associated with my new friend and formidable trainer.

I was on Maya's couch.

Relief hit first. No unfamiliar sheets. No morning-after regrets. I was fully clothed, my shoes were neatly placed by the door, and a blanket had been tucked over me.

No smeared lipstick, no taste of another's mouth on mine. Nothing to indicate I'd done anything reckless.

"Oh, thank fuck," I whispered.

I rarely let myself indulge in alcohol as much as I did last night. After what happened with Kieran ten years ago, I rarely let myself get inebriated, wary of making yet another devastating mistake.

But then, inexplicably, underneath the relief was... disappointment?

I couldn't understand the feeling. I guess with everything that had passed between Lucian and me, a part of me had wanted... something to happen.

Lucian had looked at me last night like he saw me—really saw me. Not as Kieran's ex. Not as the tragic, estranged daughter of the Lockwood family.

But as a woman. One who was changing. Growing. Becoming.

And I liked it—I fucking loved it.

I leaned back against the couch cushions and exhaled. Maybe I'd let Maya get too into my head and imagined the whole thing. Maybe the warmth in Lucian's gaze was just his kindness, his steady loyalty.

Maybe I was projecting hopes onto the only man in my life who hadn't treated me like an afterthought.

I mean, how desperate did I have to be that I was wishing I had a drunken one-night stand with him?

The front door creaked open before I could spiral too far.

Maya stepped in, balancing two cups of coffee and a paper bag. The bag carried the same logo as the restaurant we were at last night. I guess she really was a regular there.

"She lives," she teased, setting the bag on the coffee table and offering me a cup.

I accepted it with grateful hands. "What time is it?"

"Late," she answered, plopping down beside me. "But I'll say you've earned the indulgence."

I raised a brow. "Really?"

She smirked, shrugging. "Enjoy it while it lasts. Suicide drills first thing tomorrow morning."

I groaned, leaning back into the chair. "I hate you."

She blew me a kiss.

I took a sip of the coffee, letting the warmth and caffeine flood my sluggish system. "How did I get here?" I asked softly.

"Lucian brought you," she answered. "Carried you in himself like a goddamn knight in pressed slacks. Laid you down, made sure you were comfortable. Wouldn't leave until I promised to call if you threw up or so much as breathed wrong."

My heart thudded. "Right."

She raised a brow, those sharp eyes of hers seeing too much. "What's with the long face?"

I shook my head and instantly regretted it when it throbbed.

"Ah, I see," Maya mused, smirking. "You hoped to wake up in a different place." She winked. "Say, maybe, Lucian Reed's bed?"

My cheeks instantly flamed. "No, Maya. Jeez."

She snorted. "Yeah, okay. I'm convinced."

I sighed. "I just—you said a bunch of things and... I thought maybe..." I stared down at my coffee. "Did I misread it?"

Maya tilted her head, scrutinizing me like she could see right through to the truth lodged in my chest. "No, babe. You didn't. But I'm guessing you're wondering why he didn't do more."

I nodded.

"Because you were drunk," she said simply. "And Lucian is a lot of things—strategist, visionary, charming devil—but he's not the kind of man who'd take advantage of someone not fully in control of their choices."

That... made sense.

And it made me feel something else entirely. It quadrupled the respect I had for Lucian.

Maya leaned in. "What happened to 'we're just friends'? Do you want something more, Sera?"

I chewed my bottom lip, at a loss for an answer. "I... don't know. What if I do want to pursue something with him? What if I regret not saying something last night?"

Maya leaned back and grinned, looking particularly proud of herself. "Then say something today. Tomorrow. Whenever. Just... don't let it fester."

I let out a breathy laugh. "You make it sound easy."

"Because it is. You don't need to make it harder than it really is."

"In case you haven't noticed, I'm not exactly dripping in feminine allure," I said. "He's an Alpha—polished and powerful. I'm..." I shrugged, familiar self-deprecation settling over me. "Me."

Maya frowned. "Okay, first of all, ew. Don't ever talk about yourself like that again. Second, Lucian isn't some shallow prick looking for arm candy. If he wanted pretty and empty, he could find it tenfold. But he's stuck to you like gum on a shoe, even though—no offense, babe—you've hardly been receptive."

That made me laugh, and she nudged me with her elbow.

"Listen," she said more gently, "you're allowed to want things. You're allowed to feel desired. And trust me, Sera, you are desirable. You have nothing to prove—not to the right man."

I stared at her in awe, unable to believe that there was someone on this earth who saw me this way.

"You're pretty fucking amazing, you know that?" I whispered.

Maya leaned in and kissed my forehead. "I know."

I craned my neck to look up at her as she stood. "Going somewhere?"

She winked. "I need to not be here for a while."

I frowned. "Here... like your home? Because of me?"

She shook her head. "Oh, no, babe. It just turns out I've made too good an impression on my surroundings, and I've become more visible than I'd like."

My frown deepened. "Huh?"

She laughed, stroking my hair affectionately. She pushed the paper bag to me. "Breakfast burrito and cinnamon roll," she announced. "Help yourself to anything in the fridge. Stay as long as you need to."

I blinked at her as she moved through the room. She grabbed her keys from the counter and slung a canvas tote over her shoulder.

She was acting so odd, but I didn't want to push. "You'll tell me what this is eventually, right?"

Her smile was soft, affectionate. "Definitely. I promise."

Then she moved towards me again and leaned down to hug me, long and warm and anchoring.

"Don't run from good things just because you're afraid," she whispered against my hair. "You've lost enough."

When the door closed behind her, I was left in the quiet of her apartment, cradling coffee between my palms and wondering what the hell was going on.

ETHAN'S POV

Twenty-three hours.

That's how long I had left to find her—the intoxicating woman with wildfire eyes and a challenge on her lips. My mate.

Maya.

Discovering her name was the easy part. Actually finding her was proving impossible. And now I was stuck prowling the streets around her favorite restaurant like a creep.

Logan was in a constant state of agitation, prowling just beneath the surface, restless.

She was out there—close, maybe—but just out of reach. And the bond didn't help. I'd honored her rules. No sniffing, no shortcuts.

And still. Nothing.

I was losing my mind. And my pride. Fast.

So when my phone buzzed, and my mother's name lit the screen, I was already frayed at the edges.

"Ethan," she greeted, her voice soft. My chest ached slightly. Ever since my father died, she hadn't fully regained her luster, and I had no idea how to give her the comfort she needed.

"Hi, Mom."

"I wanted to ask..." She hesitated. "How is your sister?"

I winced at the memory of last night at the restaurant—the one I found out that Maya frequented often.

I should have acted better, but Maya's scent I'd smelled on Sera made me lose half of my mind, and nothing else mattered but finding out where it had come from.

Sera's words had cut deeper than I let on, and since Kieran's Beta so eloquently explained the dynamics of our rocky relationship, I couldn't deny that I'd deserved them.

"She's fine," I said instinctively.

She exhaled. "So you've seen her? Things are better between you two?"

My mother was too fragile to handle the brutal truth—which was that Sera loathed me. And I wasn't going to admit that someone half my weight threw me across the room like a ragdoll.

Whoever was training her at OTS must be a fucking legend.

"They're..." I paused, searching for the right lie. "Better."

Her relief was palpable. "Good. That's good." A pause. Then, gentler: "I baked her those cinnamon raspberry scones she used to like. Will you come pick them up and take them to her?"

I almost said no.

But the hope in her voice stalled me. I knew she was trying to mend the rift between her and Sera the only way she knew how. Her pride held her back from facing her daughter, and my sister's new antagonism wasn't making things easier.

I sighed. "Yeah. I can do that."

"Thank you, darling."

I hung up and dropped my phone in the console. I looked up—

And saw her.

A flash of dark hair, honey-toned skin, long legs in combat boots. She was walking down the sidewalk, swinging a tote bag like she didn't owe the world a damn thing.

Maya.

Her presence hit me like a freight train. Logan surged—alert, feral, wound-up. My chest ached with need.

She was here.

I'd found her again. Finally.