

My Sister 361

Chapter 361 IGNORANCE IS BLISS

SERAPHINA'S POV

Ignorance is bliss.

I've always thought that was a cowardly way of thinking. Maybe it's because I spent most of my life with a big question mark over my head, and I believed I'd find happiness only if every question was answered.

Why didn't I have a wolf?

Why didn't my parents or siblings love me?

Why didn't Kieran see me?

What really happened eleven years ago?

Ignorance is fucking bliss.

After putting Daniel to sleep—holding him close and whispering, again and again, that he was not an accident, that he was fiercely, immeasurably loved—I retreated to the guest room.

I should have been exhausted; it had been such a long, arduous day.

Maybe I felt restless because Lucian's bracelet was gone. All I could do was lie in bed, staring at the ceiling as my thoughts churned and churned and churned.

I should have forced myself to sleep.

I should have watched a movie or read a book.

I should have fucking waited for Kieran.

Better yet, I should have set Astrid's damn USB on fire and pretended it never existed.

Instead, deciding I needed to do something before I went crazy, I retrieved the small device.

It looked innocuous. Unremarkable. A simple piece of hardware.

I slid it into my laptop.

The files populated slowly.

My chest tightened, but I forced my breathing steady and clicked the first one.

The surveillance footage loaded in grainy black and white, the fixed ceiling angle flattening everything into shadows and sharp contrasts.

I recognized the grand lounge of the Elysian Hotel immediately.

I drew my knees up to my chest as the footage played.

Celeste appeared first, stunning and elegant as always. I watched as she sauntered across the room, aware that several heads turned as she passed.

Then she stopped at the bar, in front of a Beta from an allied pack I vaguely remembered. He liked to hang around Celeste at joint parties and banquets, a drop in the pool of males who were obsessed with her.

Gods, what was his name? Jack? James?

My memory faltered even as, for the first time in eleven years, it surfaced.

I remembered another presence that night. A man too close. Feeling trapped. A voice in my ear. The choking smell of cologne layered over alcohol.

But I had never held onto his face clearly. I had filed him away as background noise in a night already spiraling out of control.

On-screen, though, he wasn't background.

They stood close enough that their shoulders nearly aligned. She angled slightly toward him; he leaned in just enough to suggest familiarity.

Without color and sound, everything became sharper in its own way.

Body language replaced dialogue. Proximity replaced tone. They sure as hell weren't talking about the weather.

I opened another file, and a different angle of a familiar hallway appeared on screen. I recognized the patterned carpet and the gilded sconces lining the walls. At the far end, the elevator doors slid open, revealing Celeste and...ugh, Jonathan?

I watched with bated breath as they stepped out and walked together to the room door at the end of the corridor.

Room 108.

The one I would later wake up in to find my life in splinters around me.

They entered it together.

The timestamp ticked forward.

Minutes passed.

The door opened again, and Celeste emerged alone, head ducked, fingers rapidly flying over her phone.

I knew what she was typing: the text that placed me precisely where I shouldn't have been.

A numbing chill began to pulse through me—not the sting of shock, not even the rawness of fresh pain, but a cold, empty quiet that flooded my veins.

My fingers felt like icicles as I clicked on a new file. It was the same hallway. The elevator doors once again opened at the far end of the corridor.

But this time, it was poor, drunk Seraphina Lockwood who stepped into view, no idea that her life was about to change forever.

My fingers dug into my skin as I watched myself move with the distracted haste of someone who believed she was responding to an emergency.

My posture was tense, my expression drawn. Even through the distortion, I could see confusion flicker across my face as I tried to get my bearings and searched for the room number in the frantic message.

And then the room door opened, and J-something stepped out.

Memory shifted uneasily inside me, fragments scraping against one another. I remembered the disorientation. The sense that something was horribly, horribly wrong.

My breath hitched as I watched him trap me against the wall and lean in. Even though there was no audio, I heard what he'd whispered loud and clear in my mind.

'Oh, come on. At least your sister has a reason to play hard to get. You should be grateful I'm giving you any attention.'

I saw myself whimper, saw my lips part with a plea.

Then, from the far angle, the elevator doors opened again.

Kieran emerged.

At first, he was stumbling, clearly inebriated. Then he saw.

The shift in his posture was immediate. His anger was visible in the rigid line of his shoulders, the speed of his stride.

He crossed the corridor in seconds and violently kicked my would-be assaulter out of frame.

Then came the part that had been twisted for a decade.

I watched myself prepare to step back from Kieran, my body angled away, distance already forming. And then he closed it, a hand tenderly reaching out for me.

He was the one who leaned in.

The one who initiated the kiss.

The camera caught it from two angles—one above, one from the side—clearly enough to dismantle the narrative that I had cornered him or engineered the encounter. It showed my hesitation, the split second where I braced before giving in.

The footage cut abruptly as we stumbled toward the room at the end of the hall.

I sat back slowly, letting out a long, heavy breath.

For a long moment, I just stared at my reflection in the black screen.

Astrid had been right; If this alone had surfaced eleven years ago, I wouldn't have been dragged through public shame. I wouldn't have been labeled opportunistic. Predatory. Desperate.

But even though I felt vindicated, I was also a little...underwhelmed.

Celeste's role could be explained away. Purely circumstantial. Who could tell what she and the male were saying?

And what was I going to do with the hallway footage? Things were good between Kieran and me now, and I had no desire to hold this against him.

Sure, he kissed me first. But I sure as hell didn't pull back. I willingly followed him into that room.

I'd meant what I said to Daniel. What had happened between Kieran and me had been messy and complicated, but we'd both been reacting on instinct triggered by the latent bond. Even before we realized it, we were always meant to be together.

I sighed and leaned forward again.

I closed that file and opened another, then another.

Astrid, to her credit, was thorough. There were multiple files with different angles and overlapping frames. Each perspective correlated with the others, stitching together a fuller version of events than I had never been able to reconstruct.

Everything aligned perfectly.

Until a folder at the bottom caught my attention.

Its naming convention was slightly off, subtle enough to escape casual notice but inconsistent with the rest of the archive. An encryption icon glowed faintly beside it, understated yet unmistakable.

I leaned closer to the screen and clicked.

Access denied.

I frowned.

I pulled up the file properties, studying the metadata and embedded transfer logs. The file wasn't empty; it hadn't been corrupted or scrubbed.

It was restricted—actively shielded behind layered permissions.

My heartbeat began to thud heavily in my ears as the implications settled in. If I hadn't opened every single folder, if I hadn't examined each file down to its underlying properties, I would have missed it entirely.

Did Astrid know this was here? Was this a mistake? A test?

When you spend a lot of time in your room, excluded from playing or training, you pick up a lot of hobbies.

It had been years since I learned how to code from a series of YouTube videos, but my grainy memory served me.

I exhaled slowly and began working through the encryption. It wasn't impenetrable, but it was layered—administrative override codes woven with institutional suppression tags, structured with painstaking precision.

It took time and patience, and a lot of errors, but the file finally opened.

The scene that appeared on my screen was neither a hallway nor a hotel room but an office—neutrally furnished, dimly lit, impersonal in a way that felt intentional.

A desk sat at the center of the frame, a single chair positioned behind it, and on the wall-mounted monitor just beyond, the same surveillance footage I had just watched played in silent repetition.

There was no timestamp, and the camera angle suggested hidden surveillance—internal security documentation, perhaps—capturing the room without the occupants' knowledge.

A figure sat at the desk, face obscured by deliberate shadow, the lighting positioned carefully enough to conceal identity.

But posture could not be disguised so easily.

The rigid set of his shoulders. The precise way his hands were folded on the desk. The stillness that was less calm and more controlled authority.

“I will purchase the full archive.”

He slid a thick envelope across the desk.

“There must be absolutely no external leaks.”

The person on the other side of the desk hesitated, his outline barely visible at the edge of the frame.
“Are you sure about this?”

He did not hesitate. “Do it.”

My breath left my lungs in a soundless exhale.

The voice had been altered—flattened, stripped of its natural resonance—but distortion could not erase identity entirely.

I didn’t need the voice. I didn’t need to see his face. Recognition struck with brutal clarity.

It was Edward Lockwood.