

## **My Sister 41**

### Chapter 41 PLAYING CINDERELLA

#### SERAPHINA'S POV

I was on the edge of a breakdown.

I stood in front of my full-length mirror on the night of the gala, heart pounding, palms sweaty, completely convinced the dress was a mistake.

It was a shimmering navy blue that swirled around me like liquid midnight. It was off-shoulder, with a fitted waist that flared slightly at the bottom. It made me feel regal and beautiful and... visible. Too visible.

What if it was too much? What if it was obvious that this dress—this stunning ethereal dress—did not belong on the body of someone as plain and ordinary as me?

I imagined all heads turning to me as I walked the red carpet, mouths spreading into mocking grins as people pointed and laughed, calling me an impostor.

Maybe this was a bad idea. There was still time—I could take off this... this costume, throw on comfy pajamas, and forget I was ever this delusional and—

The sound of the doorbell jolted me out of my spiral, and my heart did a backflip in my chest.

Lucian was here.

"Shit," I whispered, my pulse skittering.

I guess there was no turning back.

I grabbed my purse and slipped on my heels with shaky hands, trying to remember to breathe.

I opened the door hesitantly, bracing myself for polite disappointment.

But Lucian didn't say a word.

He just stared. Eyes wide, jaw unhinged.

"Lucian?" I asked cautiously, fighting the urge to hide. "Is... is it that bad?"

His eyes snapped to mine. "What? No. No, Sera—gods. You look..."

His mouth opened and closed again, like his vocal cords had failed him.

I wanted to bite my lip—but I had lipstick on. I wanted to rub my sweaty palms on my dress, but that seemed like a crime worthy of jail time. I wanted to run my hands through my hair, but I'd spent hours curling it and doing it up in an intricate half-up, half-down style.

There was no outlet for the anxiety running wild inside me.

"I look...?"

"Like the moon goddess stepped off her throne and decided to eviscerate us mortals with her beauty."

I blinked. "That's... very specific."

He smiled, a little crookedly. "And very accurate. You're stunning, Sera."

Heat crawled up my neck, and I had never been more grateful for makeup. "I don't look... odd?"

I wasn't fishing for more compliments, but if Lucian, who'd seen me at my lowest, thought I could fit in with the elites, then maybe I could believe it.

He took a step forward, his pupils dilated as he took me in. "You're a vision, Sera. No one will be able to keep their eyes off you—and not because you look 'odd'." He took my hand, and my breath hitched. "But because you'll be the most beautiful woman in the room."

My breath came out in a woosh, and I almost sagged against him in relief. Lucian had an uncanny ability to put me at ease, and he was such a sincere person that I had to believe I did look amazing.

"Thank you." I smiled, feeling better.

"Speaking of gods eviscerating mortals..." I said, running an appreciative glance down his body—he was wearing a black bespoke tux cut perfectly to his frame. A crisp white shirt underneath, satin lapels, and cufflinks that caught the glow of my porch lights. His dark hair was swept back with deliberate ease, curling above his collar, just tousled enough to hint he hadn't tried too hard.

Every detail said power, wealth, control—the thought that I was going to walk into the gala with him by my side was dizzying.

Lucian grinned, spreading his arms wide. "You like?"

I held my hands up as if to shield my face. "No, please stop. You're blinding me! My eyes can only take so much before they melt out of my head."

His laughter echoed into the still night, and when I took his hand and he led me out to the waiting limo, I left my anxiety and self-doubt behind on my front porch.

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The red carpet was surreal.

Cameras flashed like fireworks, voices called out names I didn't recognize, and questions buzzed around us like flies.

But Lucian stayed close, hand steady at my back, his low voice grounding me.

"You're doing amazing," he murmured between answering questions from reporters and posing for pictures.

"They're all staring," I whispered, doing my best to keep from squinting or flat-out closing my eyes against all the dazzling bursts of light.

"If two stars took human form and walked the red carpet, would you, too, not stare?" he asked.

I huffed a laugh. "You're ridiculously good at this."

He leaned in, warm breath brushing my ear. "Only when I mean it."

We reached the end of the carpet, and just as the staff greeted us with polite bows, I felt the air shift.

It was absolutely absurd how I instantly knew what I would find as I turned my head.

Kieran and Celeste.

They stood near the entry to the ballroom, a little too perfectly posed for the cameras. Celeste wore a silver dress that sparkled like ice, her smile fixed and sharp. Kieran stood beside her, his suit a muted complement to her dress—all broad shoulders and quiet intensity—an arm around her waist.

The moment he saw me, he stilled.

His eyes widened. Then flickered to Lucian. Then narrowed.

Lucian felt my hesitation. "You good?"

I took a steeling breath and pulled my gaze away from the couple, determined not to let anything ruin this night.

I gave Lucian a smile. "I'm perfect."

His hand pressed against my lower back, spreading warmth through me. "Then, shall we?"

I lifted my chin. "We shall."

As we moved forward, I felt Kieran's gaze drag across me like fire, but I didn't turn toward him—no matter how much I wanted to.

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KIERAN'S POV

When she stepped onto that carpet, time stopped.

Ever since we got divorced, it was like every time I turned around, there was a new version of Sera to behold.

Sera, the ice queen. Sera, the author. Sera, the indifferent.

And now—Sera, the fucking goddess.

She looked luminous, her dress sparkling around her like a starry night sky. Her hair was swept up just enough to show the elegant line of her neck, and her eyes—gods, those eyes— they seemed to glow like they had their very own energy source.

She outshone everyone and everything on the red carpet.

And she had her arm entwined with Lucian fucking Reed.

My breath stilled when her eyes fell on me and Celeste at the entrance of the ballroom.

My throat dried. My hand tightened around Celeste's waist as if to remind myself that she was who I came here with—who I wanted.

Yet, I couldn't keep my eyes off Sera.

I wanted to say something. Anything.

But before I could open my mouth, before I could form the words, she was already looking away, smiling up at Lucian.

And then she walked past us like we didn't exist.

It was automatic, the way my gaze followed her as they walked into the ballroom without a single glance back. My feet shifted in that direction, my body tilting towards her like a sunflower to the sun.

Celeste's grip on my arm turned iron-tight.

"Well, look who's playing Cinderella," she said, her sharp voice snapping me back to myself, stopping me from going after Sera.

Only when I pursed my lips together did I realize that my mouth had been slightly ajar.

"She thinks a fancy dress and an accessory like Lucian Reed make her something?" Celeste continued, every word dripping with disdain and... envy?

"If only she knew how she looks, jumping from Alpha to Alpha. Rumor has it at OTS that Lucian pants after her like a fucking puppy." She scoffed. "Pathetic."

She looked up at me, gaze expectant, like I was supposed to add my two cents.

But my mind was still fixed on Sera, on the image burned into me.

"Come on," I murmured, pulling Celeste towards the entrance. "Let's go."

And as we walked into the ballroom, crossing the same threshold Sera and Lucian had just passed, I couldn't help feeling like I had the wrong 'accessory' on my arm.