

My Sister 42

Chapter 42 FIERCE, LUMINOUS WOMAN

SERAPHINA'S POV

I had never stood in a room like this before.

The crystal chandeliers shimmered like they were auditioning to be stars. Every table was draped in silk and crowded with names I'd only ever read about in magazines—Alphas, Betas, magnates, dignitaries.

Lucian kept his hand gently against my back as we were escorted to our table, his presence a quiet but steadying anchor.

The gala was stunning, and our entrance had gone smoothly—better than expected, honestly, considering I rarely ever clashed with Kieran and Celeste and came out unscathed.

But as I sat down and the hostess announced the program and the speakers, my throat dried, and my earlier anxiety returned with a vengeance.

Because tonight, I wasn't just Lucian's date.

I was also the keynote speaker for the OTS program.

I was going to throw up. Or faint. Or combust into a puff of ash and anxiety.

Lucian leaned closer, his voice a warm murmur by my ear. "You've got this."

I looked at him, desperate for a sliver of his certainty. "How can you be so sure?"

"Because all you need to do is speak from the heart. And you're the most genuine person I've ever met, Sera." He gently squeezed my hand under the table. "Don't try to impress them. Just tell the truth."

I swallowed hard.

The truth.

I was supposed to get up on that stage and tell the elite crowd how I was ridiculed my whole life, cast aside, and ignored because I didn't have a wolf. I had to recall the details of a loveless marriage where I was never enough and then cast aside as soon as my shiny sister reappeared.

The thought made my stomach churn violently.

Too soon, my name was called.

Lucian gave my hand one last encouraging squeeze and a 'you got this' smile as I stood, swaying slightly.

"You can do this, Sera," I mumbled to myself as all eyes curiously turned to me.

My heels clicking against the stage stairs seemed to echo around me, and the lights were so bright, I could barely see the audience. Which was probably a good thing—I wouldn't be able to see their judgment and disapproval.

I glanced down at my hands—no shaking, but they felt stiff. My tongue sat heavy in my mouth.

You've got this, Sera.

I took a breath. And another. And then, I began.

The truth.

"I was fifteen when I first felt different."

The room quieted.

There—ripped the bandage right off. No going back now.

"I'd always been missing the wolf sensitivity that came gradually before the first Shift." I inhaled sharply. "But then, all my mates Shifted for the first time. My brother did. My younger sister did. By nineteen, I was sure—there was something wrong with me."

My hands gripped the edge of the podium tightly as I continued.

"As quickly as I noticed this, everyone else did too. I wasn't the kind of girl anyone expected much from. Not the daughter you took pride in. Not the she-wolf you brought into the fold. Just someone forgotten at the edges of a room."

I glanced up—and found Lucian watching me, standing out in the sea of faces, steady and proud.

"I was never accepted by the pack. Never cherished by my family. But OTS didn't forget me. They accepted me at my lowest without asking for power or pedigree. They looked past what I was; saw what I could be." I tried to find Maya in the crowd—she said she was coming with her mate—but she didn't seem to have arrived yet.

"All OTS asked from me was my determination. To train. To heal. To help myself in a way no one ever did. And for the first time in my life, I didn't feel helpless or useless or broken. I felt strong."

My lips curved into a small smile. "OTS helped me see that I may be different, yes. But that's where I find my strength."

There was no rustle in the crowd. No polite coughs. Just... stillness. My lips were the only thing moving.

"And I know I'm not the only one. There are wolves out there like me, feeling lost, forgotten, broken. What OTS does isn't just training. It's awakening. It's survival. It's hope. And I am living proof that hope matters. It heals and transforms. And if you give it a chance—give yourself a chance, you'll be amazed at what you can achieve."

I smiled gently, even though my heart was pounding like a caged animal.

"Thank you."

The silence that followed was absolute.

Panic surged up my spine. Oh gods. Had I gone too far? Been too raw? Were they embarrassed for me?

And then—

A single clap.

Then another.

And then, like an explosion, the entire ballroom erupted in applause. People stood. They clapped and whooped and whistled, and someone even called out, "Well said, girl!"

The noise hit me like a wave, stunning in its warmth.

I blinked against the sudden sting in my eyes, barely able to move as the host thanked me and gestured for the next portion of the evening.

Lucian was already there when I stepped down the stairs, eyes gleaming, hand held out.

"You take my breath away, Sera," he murmured, taking my hand in his.

I let out a breathless laugh, the adrenaline making me lightheaded. "I thought I'd bombed."

"I would've fought the entire room if they hadn't clapped," he said, mock serious. "But I'm glad it didn't come to that. My tux is dry-clean only."

I laughed again, this time more freely.

The host took the mic again. "And now, esteemed guests, we invite everyone to the dancefloor for the first waltz of the night—opened by our generous benefactor Lucian Reed and his stunning date, Miss Seraphina Blackthorne."

My heart skidded.

Lucian turned to me, brows raised. "Still breathing?"

"Barely."

He smiled, hand outstretched. "Come on, let's color everyone in this room green with envy."

I hesitated for half a second—then slipped my hand into his.

The music began. He guided me effortlessly to the center of the floor, the crowd parting like the Red Sea.

And for the second time that night, I was under the lights.

But this time, the warm, fluttery feeling in my belly wasn't anxiety.

KIERAN'S POV

As if Sera hadn't already blown me away with her appearance on the red carpet, she had to go and knock my socks off with her speech.

I was still reeling, my mind still clouded—her in that gown, her with Lucian, the way she glowed.

But when she stepped up to that podium, something shifted.

Her voice was soft, uncertain. But then it sharpened, and every word struck like a honed blade.

She peeled herself open in front of this powerful, judgmental crowd—and instead of being cut down, she rose higher.

And all I could do was watch, listen, spellbound.

She was radiant. Brave. Real.

Her speech cracked something inside me.

I'd always seen fragments of her—the quiet girl who hid behind everyone else, the dutiful mother, the shadow of a wife I never really knew.

But this Sera? This fierce, luminous woman?

How had I missed her?

She'd been under my nose for ten fucking years and I'd been blind. Oblivious. So fucking stupid.

By the time she said "I am living proof," my chest ached with something I couldn't name. Was it pride? Regret? Longing?

The silence after her speech was unbearable. I knew the crowd was probably stunned, but I couldn't let her stand there thinking she had failed.

So I clapped. First.

Hard.

Then the rest followed, and I saw her flinch—then light up as realization hit. That smile... gods, that smile.

I wanted to take a picture, make several copies, and hang them in every space I dwelt, just so I could behold that smile everywhere I went.

When Lucian met her at the bottom of the stairs and took her hand, and that radiant smile was directed at him, the applause still echoing, something inside me twisted so violently it almost choked me.

And then the host announced the opening dance, and all the air was knocked clean out of my lungs.

Lucian and Sera.

No. No, that couldn't be right.

The opening dance wasn't just a tradition. It was a statement—a symbolic claim.

And as an Alpha, Lucian knew that.

He knew exactly what it meant to guide her out under the lights first. To take her hand in front of the most elite wolves in the region. He was staking an unspoken, public claim on Seraphina.

'Mine,' Ashar growled.

My jaw clenched as they began to dance.

She looked at him with something almost shy. And he looked at her like she was the only woman in the room.

Her steps were a little halted, but I saw her relax in his arms as they glided across the dance floor.

My muscles locked tight to keep me from launching myself forward and ripping them apart.

"Should we join them?" Celeste's voice sliced through the haze in my mind. Her nails were already digging into my arm again. "We're supposed to be making an impression."

I shook my head, forcing my voice steady. "Not feeling up to it. You go ahead if you want."

Celeste scoffed. "Seriously? It's our debut, Kie. Are you going to let Sera—after that pathetic woe-is-me speech—and her new lapdog outshine us?"

"Bathroom," I growled out, standing up.

Before Celeste could protest, I was already walking away, my back to the gathering crowd.

Because if I stepped onto that dancefloor—if I got close enough to see Sera in Lucian's arms, smiling up at him like that—I didn't trust myself not to snap.

Not to tear him away from her.

Not to cause a scene.

Gods, what was wrong with me?