

My Sister 5

Chapter 5 THE FUNERAL

SERAPHINA'S POV

Another sleepless night.

The irony wasn't lost on me—I hadn't shared a bed with Kieran in years, yet the unfamiliar silence of this new house felt louder than any absence. Every time I closed my eyes, the ghosts of what might have been danced behind my lids.

Three times I'd crept down the hall to check on Daniel, only to find him curled peacefully under his Star Wars comforter, his breathing deep and even. Thank the moon for small mercies. This modest house might lack the imposing security of the Alpha Manor, but I'd fill every inch with enough love to compensate.

When dawn's pale fingers finally pried through my blackout curtains, a lead weight settled in my stomach.

Today we'd bury my father.

I dressed slowly, each movement weighted with dread. It wasn't grief that paralyzed me—our relationship had died long before his heart stopped beating. No, it was the prospect of facing my family's judgmental stares, of standing across a coffin from Kieran while our divorce papers gathered fresh ink.

Ex-husband. The term scraped against my raw nerves.

Daniel's door creaked as I pushed it open. My breath caught—there he sat, already dressed in the miniature black suit we'd picked out together, his small fingers deftly maneuvering his Nintendo Switch.

"Morning, Mom." He flashed me a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes.

Tears pricked my lashes. Where had my baby gone? The boy staring back at me wore Kieran's strong jawline, his piercing gaze. A living reminder of everything I'd lost—and everything I'd gained.

"Look at you," I whispered, smoothing his lapel. "All grown up."

Sadness shadowed his face, but he steeled himself and put the video game console aside. "Let's go," he whispered, shoulders squaring with forced bravery.

But when the old stone church loomed into view, Daniel's courage faltered. His knuckles whitened around the car door handle.

"Hey." I cupped his tense shoulder. "Talk to me."

When he turned, the unshed tears in his eyes shattered me. "We didn't... we didn't get to say goodbye. Does that mean Grandpa doesn't know we loved him?"

The question hit like a silver dagger between my ribs. While my father's absence had become my normal, Daniel had lost his favorite storytelling partner, his secret cookie supplier.

I pressed my palm over his thundering heart. "Grandpa's right here, my love." My voice cracked. "And here." I tapped his temple gently. "As long as we remember him, he's never really gone."

Daniel exhaled shakily, some of the tension leaving his small frame. "Okay."

"Ready?"

His nod was all the strength I needed. Together, we stepped out of the car.

The church doors swallowed us into a sea of mourners—pack members in their finest black, allies from neighboring territories, and a scattering of human associates who'd done business with my father. The air hummed with whispered condolences and the cloying scent of lilies.

My family sat like royalty in the front pew. My mother's head rested against Ethan's shoulder, while Celeste—

Gods.

Even in grief, my sister looked like she'd stepped from a magazine spread. Sunlight through stained glass windows gilded her perfect blonde waves, her designer dress clinging to curves that had always made my own frame feel boyish in comparison.

"Daniel, darling!" My mother's arms opened wide as we approached—not for me, never for me—but for the grandson who carried the Blackthorne name. The grandson who mattered.

I watched numbly as Daniel was enfolded in her embrace, his small frame disappearing against her black lace. That left only one vacant seat—sandwiched between Celeste and the end of the pew.

My sister's glacial blue eyes raked over me. A decade apart, yet her hatred hadn't dimmed. She inched away as I sat, the silk of her dress whispering against the pew like a snake's warning.

Trying to force my thoughts away from the family who didn't want me, I let my gaze wander round the hall—and land on another family that didn't want me. The Blackthornes occupied the opposite side of the aisle, Kieran's broad shoulders cutting an imposing silhouette beside his parents.

Leona Blackthorne's lips pursed when she noticed me looking. Like my family rejected me, the Blackthornes refused to accept me. To them, I was Kieran's legal wife, not his Luna.

His mother, Leona, still held the title of Luna even after the Alpha title was passed to Kieran. Now, she regarded me icily. I'm sure she was ecstatic over the divorce news. The stain on her family was finally gone.

A small, warm hand slipped into mine. Daniel had extricated himself from my mother's clutches and now formed a living barrier between me and Celeste. His fingers squeezed mine—a silent I'm here.

I squeezed back, drawing strength from this remarkable child who shouldn't have needed to be the brave one. The organ's mournful chords signaled the service's start. Just a few more hours. I could hold myself together that long. Couldn't I?

I had to give Celeste credit—her timing was impeccable.

She waited through the entire service. Waited through the graveside ceremony as we each scattered handfuls of earth onto our father's coffin. Waited until the crowd dispersed, leaving only Daniel and me watching the gravediggers begin their solemn work.

"How thoughtful of you to offer help with the funeral arrangements." Her voice sliced through my grief like a silver blade.

I stiffened but didn't turn. "I meant it." The hollow ache in my chest deepened. My single text offering assistance had gone unanswered—my mother's silence spoke volumes. With Celeste back, I was more obsolete.

Celeste's laugh was all sharp edges. "As if anyone would accept anything from you."

The wind carried her cloying jasmine perfume as she stepped closer. "Ten years, sister," she hissed. "Ten years you played house with my life. But I'm reclaiming what's mine—my family, my position..." Her breath warmed my ear. "My Kieran."

I almost started laughing in front of my father's grave.

The absurdity—Celeste had always owned them all. Their love, their loyalty, Kieran's heart—none of it had ever truly been mine to lose.

"Welcome home," I murmured to the freshly turned earth. Today was about honoring my father, not fighting battles I was destined to lose.

Celeste always won.

The crunch of gravel announced her departure. I didn't need to look to know she'd gone straight to Kieran—could picture perfectly how Leona's face would light up, how Kieran's arms would open instinctively. When Daniel shifted beside me, I caught the confirmation in my periphery: Celeste tucked against Kieran's chest like she belonged there, smirking over his shoulder.

"Mom?" Daniel's small hand found mine. My brave boy, standing guard between me and the world. "Can I go see Grandma?"

The plea in his eyes undid me. However much they rejected me, Daniel deserved his family. "Of course, sweetheart." My kiss lingered in his hair as he dashed away.

From across the field, I watched Christian scoop Daniel up with grandfatherly ease, Leona fussing over his suit. At least they loved him—the one good thing to come from this sham of a marriage.

Alone now, I faced the gaping hole in the earth. The gaping hole in my life.

"Goodbye, Dad," I whispered to the wind, my tears falling not just for the father I'd lost, but for the daughter he'd never truly seen.

I turned from my father's grave, my heels sinking into the soft earth as I made for the sanctuary of my car. I'd wait there—alone, invisible—until this miserable affair was over.

I was halfway out of the gravesite when chaos ensued.

One minute: a somber afternoon pierced only by muffled sobs. The next: a nightmare of snarls and screams as rogues poured from the tree line like shadows given teeth.

Daniel.

His name was a prayer on my lips as I whirled back, scanning the chaos. My brother's massive brown wolf stood guard over our mother, his fangs dripping crimson. Across the clearing, Kieran's midnight-black form circled Celeste—of course.

No one looked my way. No one remembered the wolfless daughter, the defective mate, the easy target.

The rogues noticed.

Yellow eyes locked onto me as gaunt forms slunk closer, nostrils flaring at the scent of my fear.

"Daniel!" My scream tore through the cacophony. Where was he? Who—

A crushing weight slammed into my back, claws tearing across my skin. I hit the ground hard, the world tilting as I scrambled backward. Above me, an emaciated rogue wolf loomed, rancid drool splattering my cheeks as it snarled.

This was it. After everything, I'd die on my knees in the dirt.

My gaze darted desperately through the fray. My shoulder was on fire, hot, thick liquid trickling down my back, but all that mattered was Daniel.

Please, I silently begged whatever deity was listening, just let me see him one last time—

The rogue lunged.

Just before he bit my head off, a black blur intercepted mid-air, the sickening crunch of bones echoing as the attacking wolf was hurled aside.

Towering over me, hackles raised and fangs bared, stood a massive black wolf I'd never seen before.