

My Sister 54

Chapter 54 FUCKING SHITSHOW

SERAPHINA'S POV

The tension in the kitchen had teeth.

Maya still had her arm looped through mine, her body warm and grounding. But every inch of me had gone cold as I stared at my brother, his shirt sleeves rolled to the elbows, oozing polished calm as he set down silverware like this was any normal night.

Like we weren't estranged, and he wasn't one of the chief orchestrators of my misery.

"Hey," he repeated.

I blinked. My throat felt suddenly too tight. "You...you live here now?"

Maya nudged me lightly. "I invited him for dinner. He wanted to see you. Talk."

I turned to her slowly and tried to keep the accusation out of my voice, but I couldn't help feeling ambushed. "Why?"

Maya shifted, suddenly uncharacteristically nervous. "Because he has regrets, Sera. He wants to apologize to you, make things right." She leaned in. "I don't want my mate and my best friend at loggerheads."

I pressed my lips tightly, looking away. It was hard not to feel like Maya had overstepped, but I guess if I squinted and turned my head to the side, I could see where she was coming from.

She only ever knew the extent of what I told her; she could never know how it truly felt to have your big brother, who was supposed to be a protector, stand with the rest of the world against you.

I inhaled through my nose and forced my limbs to move, to sit at the modest kitchen table from where I could watch Maya set to work on making dinner.

"Here," Ethan said quietly, pushing a glass of red wine towards me. I accepted it without looking up at him.

"Sera?"

I stared at the dark red liquid. "Hmm?"

"I'm glad we're doing this."

I shrugged in reply. I couldn't return his sentiment just yet. They should've been glad I didn't immediately race for the door.

While they cooked, I watched Maya and Ethan from the corner of my eye. They'd only been mates for a short while, but they had a dynamic that was kind of sweet to watch.

They teased each other relentlessly, working seamlessly together. So while I still felt uncomfortable and there was an ache in my chest I couldn't explain, I was at least happy for my friend that she'd found what I'd spent most of my life—especially the last ten years—missing.

When they were done, they laid out grilled salmon, sweet potatoes, and a tossed salad, and we settled to eat.

I waited for ten minutes to pass, for our plates to be filled and the first couple of forkfuls to be consumed before I spoke.

"You wanted to talk?" I said coolly, folding my napkin into a tighter and tighter square in my lap.

Ethan cleared his throat and nodded once. "I wanted to apologize."

I arched an eyebrow. "For what?"

He sighed heavily. "Everything. For shunning you all these years, treating you as less than. For being a bad brother."

I stared, shocked at how...easy the apology had come.

There was no tremor in his voice. No guilt. Just calm, measured speech, like this was everyday conversation.

Like his 'being a bad brother' hadn't been pivotal in ruining my life.

"Right," I mumbled, turning back to my plate.

"Do you forgive me?"

I snorted into my glass of wine.

Maya shifted beside me. "Sera—"

"No, it's okay," Ethan cut in. "She deserves to feel as wronged as she wants. I didn't come here expecting forgiveness so quickly."

"Good," I muttered.

He studied me for a beat. Then, his next words cut through the remaining warmth in the room.

"Celeste tried to kill herself earlier today."

Maya went still beside me. My stomach bottomed out. That was why Kieran had run out like his ass was on fire.

Ethan continued, tone deliberately measured. "She drank bleach. Thankfully, she was already in the hospital and was quickly stabilized, but the doctors say her wolf is rapidly deteriorating. She's in an extremely fragile state right now."

I blinked, waiting for the right emotions to spread through me—shock, guilt, panic, grief, even. But all I could feel was a distant, surreal numbness. Like I was finding out news about someone I didn't know.

Maya reached for my hand under the table, but I didn't squeeze back.

"I'm not asking you to care about her," Ethan said. "But I am asking you to stop."

I turned my head slowly. "Stop what, exactly?"

"Stop going after Kieran."

I laughed. Bitter and low. "You think I went after him, that I'm going after him?"

"Celeste thinks he loves you, or at least that you two still have some kind of connection. It tears her apart, and she's slowly unraveling every day."

"That's not my fault," I said. "She should talk to Kieran about it. There's nothing going on between us, and he should do a better job of assuring her."

"But can you blame her?" Ethan said softly. "You and Kieran hurt her all those years ago and—"

"I seem to recall you being at the garden the night of the gala." My voice was tight. "Are you not curious about the message she sent me? About the possibility that Celeste had something to do with my being in that hotel room that night?"

Ethan sighed. "Speculation aside—"

My fork clanged against my plate, and I felt Maya wince. "Speculation?" I said incredulously.

Ethan didn't flinch. "I'm not asking for much, Sera. I know the rift between you two won't be so easily sealed, just...stop feeding it. Don't hurt her any more than she already is. Don't be the reason she attempts to give up again."

The silence in the kitchen felt like broken glass. I stared at Ethan for a long time, struggling to arrange my tumbling thoughts and emotions.

I stood.

Maya stood too. "Sera, please."

"This is why you brought me here?" I said, eyes burning. "So your mate could guilt-trip me?"

"It's not like that—"

"No," I snapped. "He said his piece. And so will I."

I turned to Ethan, who had his jaw clenched. "Celeste made her choices. She tried to end her life because she lost control of a narrative she manipulated ten years ago. That's not my fault. That's not on me. I will not shoulder the blame for her unraveling."

I blinked away treacherous tears that threatened to spill out of my eyes. "And the fact that you gave that half-assed apology, went through this entire fucking ruse just so you could once again plead

Celeste's case, once again prove that you have and will always be on her side, is the reason why I will never forgive you, Ethan."

He blanched. "Sera—"

"Update your family tree," I hissed. "You have only one sister."

"Sera—" Maya reached for me, but I yanked my arm from her grasp and strode out of the kitchen.

MAYA'S POV

The slamming door echoed through my ribcage.

Ethan stayed sitting, his expression unreadable.

I turned to him slowly. "What the hell was that, Ethan?"

He sighed. "It needed to be said."

"Did it?"

He met my eyes. "She needed to hear it. Celeste's on the edge, Maya. She could've died."

"And you thought ambushing Sera and accusing her of chasing after Kieran was going to fix that?"

"I think saving my sister's life is more important than anything else."

"Sera is your sister, too!"

His eyes flickered. "She's not the one tethering over the edge."

"She's been tethering over the fucking edge for decades, and you never once noticed!"

"I—" He shook his head. "You don't understand."

I nodded, stepping around the table, eyes burning. "Maybe I don't get the full extent of your relationship, but I understand that tonight, you used me to get to her."

His eyes narrowed. "I didn't use you."

"Bullshit. You knew she wouldn't come if you asked her. You asked me to do it because you knew she trusted me."

He stood now too, towering slightly over me. "And was that so wrong, helping me?"

"And what about me, Ethan?" I hissed. "Did you think for a second how it would feel to sit between my best friend and my mate and listen to that fucking shitshow?"

A muscle in his jaw ticked. "I didn't expect it to go like this."

"Of course you didn't. You thought she'd cry and give in and play the part you all need her to play—again."

I turned away and braced my hands on the counter.

"I can't fucking believe this," I whispered.

A long silence followed.

Then Ethan said quietly, "You're angry."

I scoffed. "Damn right I am. You had the gall to bring up Celeste's suicide attempt as if it was somehow Sera's fault, as if she hadn't already been wrongfully blamed for everything else that has ever gone wrong."

His jaw ticked. "I came here in good faith. I thought maybe—"

"Oh, spare me!" I snapped. "You came to make Sera the villain, something your entire fucking family loves to do. You didn't even have the decency to mean that weak-ass apology."

I shook my head. "I should have ended this the moment I realized who you are."

Ethan stiffened. "Don't."

I turned to him. "Don't what?"

"Don't say things you don't mean, things you'll regret later."

I straightened and crossed my arms. "Like what? That I should've walked away the moment I realized you were Sera's asshole brother?"

His face hardened. "Maya, watch what you say."

"Or what?" I challenged, rising to match him, our gazes locked in a fiery tango. "You'll do to me what you did to her? Torture me? Silence me? Gaslight me? Make me feel like I'm worthless?"

His voice dropped an octave. "I can deal with your temper, Maya. I can deal with your sarcasm, your fire, your dramatics—hell, I fucking love it all. But don't challenge my loyalty to this relationship. Not like this."

"How am I supposed to trust your fucking loyalty when I've watched you hurt the girl you call sister? It doesn't paint you in a favorable light, Ethan."

"Maya," he ground out, "stop this."

"Why should I?"

He stepped closer. "Because I won't accept it."

I lifted my chin. "And what about me? What about what I'm willing to accept?"

We stared at each other. Unmoving. Unflinching. Both of us breathing too hard in the too-quiet room.

He shook his head. "Think carefully about where this conversation is going, Maya."

"No," I said, my voice clipped. "You think very carefully. Think about your actions and who you really are. Because I am not going to choose you over what's right."

The silence between us was sharp. Final.

And then, without another word, I turned my back on him, heart hammering, chest burning as I drew the line.