

## **My Sister 55**

Chapter 55 RETAIL THERAPY

SERAPHINA'S POV

My vision blurred as I stood on the sidewalk in front of Maya's apartment building, my fingers trembling on my phone as I tried to order an Uber to take me home.

The sun was lower in the sky now, casting long gold shadows on the pavement. I'd barely spent an hour in there, and yet it had felt like an eternity.

I cursed myself when my fingers slipped for the umpteenth time, wondering when exactly I would stop letting Celeste and Kieran and Ethan and every other ugly part of my past affect me so acutely.

It was like I took a step forward only to stumble three steps backwards.

"Sera!"

I stiffened at the sound of Maya's voice and didn't turn, locking my spine.

"Sera, wait—"

I shook my head. "Save it, Maya. I don't want to hear you justify his actions or plead his case."

Remorse flashed across her face as she stepped in front of me. "I'm not here to do that, Sera. I'm here to apologize to you."

I blinked. "You are?"

She took her hands in mine. "Of course I am. Gods, Sera, I'm so sorry, I had no idea it would blow up like that."

"You could have warned me," I said tightly. "I could have told you that that's the kind of shit that happens when you put Ethan and me in the same room."

"I feel so awful, Sera."

I sighed. "I get it. You didn't mean harm."

"I didn't," she said quickly, breath hitching. "But I still hurt you. And I'm so fucking sorry."

I looked at her—really looked—and saw the ache in her eyes, the one I'd carried in mine for so long. Regret. Shame. Something deeper, unspoken.

I frowned, glancing back at the building. “Did something happen?”

She shook her head. “Forget that.” She squeezed my hand tighter. “Do you forgive me?”

I bit my lip. “Listen, Maya, I understand that Ethan is your mate, and I know that bond is stronger than anything else. I don’t want our friendship to affect that, so maybe you and I should maintain some distance—”

Maya’s eyes flared. “Sera! How can you say that?”

The hurt in her eyes took me off guard. “I—”

“Does our relationship mean that little to you that you’d just give it up?”

My mouth gaped. “No, that’s not what I—” I exhaled. “I’ve never had a friend like you, Maya—”

“And I’ve never had a friend like you!”

I blinked. “That... can’t be right.”

“It is,” she insisted, stepping closer. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but I can be brusque, intimidating, and generally antagonistic.” She shrugged. “Those are not particular attributes that attract friends.”

My lips twitched. “You are pretty intimidating,”—I squeezed her hand—“but I’ve been told lately that I’m becoming more and more antagonistic.”

Her laugh was like a sigh. “Oh, no, am I rubbing off on you?”

“Even more reason why we should keep our distance.”

Her grip tightened on mine. “Don’t even dare joke about that, Sera.”

I couldn’t help it this time; I laughed.

Forgiveness wasn’t a straight line. It curved, twisted, doubled back on itself until you barely knew which way was forward.

I wasn’t ready to forgive Ethan. Maybe I never would be.

But Maya... Maya was different.

I pulled her into a hug, tightening my arms around her.

“I don’t want to lose you, too,” I murmured.

Her entire body heaved with her sigh of relief. “I’m so sorry I betrayed you; it’ll never happen again.”

“You didn’t betray me,” I said, pulling back slightly, “but Ethan did. And if he uses you like that again—”

“I’ll drop him,” Maya said instantly, fire flashing in her eyes. “I swear to you, Seraphina. I don’t care if he’s my mate or my soulmate or whatever new moniker the Moon Goddess comes up with. I will never abandon a friend for a man. I could live without him.” She stepped closer. “I refuse to live without you.”

That undid me.

I exhaled slowly, something loosening in my chest that I hadn’t realized was coiled tight.

We hugged again, clinging to each other on the street corner like two war-weary soldiers clinging to the same lifeline.

When we finally pulled back, Maya sniffed and looked down, noting the Uber app open on my phone.

“No,” she declared, taking the device from my hand and pocketing it. “We need catharsis to properly process all the trauma we just went through.”

I snorted. “Trauma? That’s cute.”

She ignored my sarcasm and beamed. “Let’s go shopping!”

I groaned, smiling. “One would think your favorite hobby was knife throwing or like rock climbing without a harness, not something as mundane as shopping.”

“Tough,” she said, looping her arm through mine and leading me towards the car park. “We need some kind of therapy after tonight, and what’s the best form?” She smirked. “Retail therapy.”

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Well, it seemed like Maya’s knowledge extended far beyond training techniques, because she was right: Retail therapy was a tried and true art.

It was like one of those makeover montages in old teen movies. We wandered into an overpriced boutique where Maya tried on an absurd wide-brimmed hat, and I vetoed a cardigan that made me look like a substitute teacher.

Then, a skincare store where she lectured me on the moral necessity of double cleansing, and I, in turn, mocked the price of a single jar of moisturizer with gold flecks in it.

With every burst of laughter at the ridiculous outfits Maya tried on and gasp of horror at the resulting price tags, I felt the tension of the day fade away.

Things couldn't really be that bad in my life as long as I had Maya in my corner and she'd promised that she wasn't going anywhere soon.

The night was already going splendidly—and then we passed it.

A storefront, glossy black with neon signs in curly pink script.

Velvet & Vice — for your darkest delights.

I raised an eyebrow and snorted in derision. "Seriously?"

Maya smirked, already tugging me toward the door. "Absolutely."

My eyes widened. "Wait, no, Maya—"

“Come on, Sera.” She continued pulling with her superior strength. “One toy won’t kill you.”

I flushed. “I don’t need—”

“Every woman needs options,” she interrupted breezily. “Men have proven time and time again that they are unreliable. Your own hands?” She wiggled her brows like she had ample experience. “They’ll never let you down.”

The interior was low-lit, sleek, and intimidating as hell. Shelves lined with objects that made my brain short-circuit. Some things I couldn’t even name.

But Maya was in her element.

She examined the toys with a critical eye, turning vibrators like she was reading wine labels. “This one’s too weak. This one’s shaped weird. Ooh, dual stimulation—very important.”

“Why do you know so much?” I hissed, trying to look casual while also hiding behind a display shaped like a swan.

“I may be able to live without a man, but not without stimulation,” she said with a wink. “Also, I’m not a coward.”

“I’m not a coward,” I said, crossing my arms.



“Great,” she said, plopping a bright pink box into my hands. “Then you won’t chicken out. This one’s waterproof.”

I blinked at the packaging. “Why do I need it to be waterproof—actually, never mind.”

Maya selected one for herself, too. “Synchronized girl-gasm night?”

“Never say that to me again,” I said flatly, but I didn’t put the box back.

We paid quickly, both of us giggling like teenagers, and stepped out onto the street. I was just about to suggest getting iced coffee or pizza—seeing as we never actually got through dinner—when I heard the worst sound imaginable.

“Seraphina?”

My spine snapped straight.

There he was—just when I thought I could end the bad day on a high note.

Kieran.