

My Sister 67

Chapter 67 CARBS AND ALCOHOL

SERAPHINA'S POV

I'd spent all night thinking about the kiss.

I finally got a couple hours of sleep, but as soon as I woke up, it was the first thing on my mind.

It had happened less than twelve hours ago, and yet it replayed in my head with a gentle ease and familiarity, like a memory that had already been playing on loop for years.

The best part was that the memory of Lucian's kiss didn't drive me crazy the way Kieran's had. It had been warm—not fiery—and gentle—not hard and demanding and possessive.

I wasn't trying to decipher intentions or force my erratic heart into a non-cardiac arrest-inducing rate.

But it had still mattered.

I'd felt safe, cradled in the warmth of his hands, the steadiness of his body. There had been something quietly reverent in the way he held me—like I was made of something sacred, not shattered pieces barely held together.

And that was...new.

The fact that there was a man in my life who didn't make me want to put my fist through a wall was so refreshing.

As I made breakfast, I kept glancing at my phone on the kitchen counter, half-hoping, half-dreading a message from him. But it stayed dark.

Would things be awkward now? Should I have said something before he left? Should I have asked Daniel to call back? Would Lucian think I regretted it?

Because I didn't.

If Daniel hadn't called...

I flushed just thinking about it. Maybe something more would've happened.

I wasn't sure how far I would've gone; I wasn't sure how far Lucian would have gone—but I don't think I would've stopped him.

The idea of being with someone else—with Lucian—wasn't as off-putting as I would have thought.

I bit my lip, smiling down at my diced tomatoes like they were the ones responsible for the warmth and anticipation stirring in my belly.

The idea that someone like Lucian—an Alpha, a man of his strength and reputation—wanted me, still felt surreal.

I wasn't used to being wanted. Not after spending ten years as little more than an avenue to satiate my otherwise cold husband's needs while he pined after someone else.

The sudden ring of the doorbell broke through my reverie, loud and sharp in the quiet house. I frowned, wiping my hands on a dish towel. I wasn't expecting anyone.

That wasn't true—I was fully prepared for either Celeste or Kieran to be on the other side of the door for our regularly scheduled altercations.

But when I opened the door, it was Maya who stood there with a six-pack of beer in one hand, a plastic bag of snacks in the other, and an odd look of vulnerability that screamed 'Please don't send me away.'

"Isn't it too early to be drinking?" I asked with a raised brow.

"Not if I intend to drink for the rest of the day," she said, breezing past me. "You'll take care of me if I blackout, yeah?"

I closed the door behind her and followed her into the kitchen, a confused frown on my face. “Are you okay? Did something happen?”

She didn’t answer right away. Just tossed the bag onto the counter and started unpacking—popcorn, chips, chocolate-covered pretzels. Comfort food. A silent alarm bell went off in my chest.

“Can’t a girl just decide she wants to have an emotional breakdown with carbs and alcohol?”

“A girl can,” I said. “Maya Cartridge, whose body is a temple and has more mental fortitude than a monk, can’t. Not unless something is seriously wrong.”

I handed her a bottle opener, waiting.

Her beer opened with a quiet fizz, and she threw her head back, downing half of the bottle in one go.

She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand and sighed.

“It’s Ethan,” she finally said, voice quiet but hard-edged.

I leaned against the counter, my chest tightening. “What did he do?”

“We fought after I left you and Lucian. I confronted him about how he let Celeste and your mom corner you like that, and instead of admitting it was wrong, he told me to respect his family, and then dangled a threat over my head.”

I winced. What the fuck was wrong with my brother?

“And I told him,” she said, slamming the bottle down a little too forcefully, “that you’re his family, too. That he couldn’t demand my respect if he didn’t give you yours.”

My stomach twisted uncomfortably. “I’m sorry,” I said softly. “I didn’t want to cause problems between you two.”

“Don’t,” Maya snapped, eyes flashing. “Don’t you dare apologize for existing.”

I blinked.

“You didn’t ask to be the family’s punching bag,” she continued, voice tight with fury. “You’re not the problem; I’m mad because they treat you like you are.”

I looked down, my throat thickening.

“Besides,” she muttered, softer now, “if Ethan can’t see through the bullshit, if he can so thoroughly defend his mother and sister like that, then maybe he’s not who I thought he was.”

My eyes widened. “Maya...”

She looked over at me, brown eyes suddenly serious. “You know what’s cruel?”

“What?”

“The mate bond.” Her words were bitter, bitten off. “This fucked-up magical lottery that says you’re permanently, irrevocably bound to this other person, no matter how dumb or frustrating or emotionally constipated they are.”

“That bad, huh?”

“If it weren’t for the bond,” Maya muttered, “I would’ve walked away a long time ago.”

I tilted my head. “Would you?”

“Yes.” She formed a fist.

"But you love him." The words slipped out before I could stop them.

Maya groaned, leaning her forehead against the cabinet.

"Right?" I nudged her gently. "It's not just the mate bond."

She sighed. "Okay, so maybe I like the sound of his laughter. And maybe I like watching horror movies with him late into the night and falling asleep on his chest. I like it when we cook together. And I like the electricity when we're intimate; there's this mind-numbing thing he does with his tongue that—"

"Okay, stop!" I held a hand up, eyes wide with alarm. "I don't need to hear about you and my brother's sex life."

We burst into laughter, but hers ended in a sigh as she hesitated. "Okay...so yeah, maybe I care for him past the mate attraction. But he's still an asshole, and I usually think with my head, not my heart or fucking hormones, and the stupid bond keeps pulling me back every damn time."

There was something painfully honest in her voice. I nodded slowly, letting that truth settle between us.

"I've always wondered..." I began, then trailed off.

She looked up. "What?"

"What it's like," I said, heat crawling up my neck. "The pull. The way it feels with someone who's...destined."

Maya blinked, then narrowed her eyes with the speed of a predator. "Is this a general curiosity question, or am I sniffing gossip?"

My cheeks burned. "I just—I was wondering."

"You're a terrible liar, Sera."

I gave her a sheepish smile.

Her eyes widened. "Wait. Did something happen?" Her voice dropped to a whisper. "With Lucian?"

I couldn't meet her eyes. "We kissed."

The scream she let out was so high-pitched I was surprised all the windows in my house didn't shatter.

“You what?!” she shrieked, grabbing my arm and shaking me. “You kissed Lucian, and you’re just now telling me?!”

“It wasn’t— It wasn’t planned,” I stammered. “It happened last night. We were just sitting on the couch talking, and then...” I shrugged. “He kissed me.”

Maya dropped onto a stool as if her legs had given out. “Okay. I need more. Was it hot? Was it soft? Did you melt? Did the world stop spinning?”

“It was...” I paused, trying to find the words. “It was nice. Gentle. Sweet.”

Her brows knit. “That’s it?”

I chewed my lip. “There wasn’t...a spark. Not like what you described with Ethan.”

“Oh.”

The silence stretched.

“But I don’t think it’s because I didn’t like it,” I added quickly. “I mean, I liked it. I really did. But it felt like—I dunno, like he was holding back.”

Maya hummed thoughtfully, nodding. "Lucian would hold back. He's the definition of restrained. Gentlemanly to a fault."

"You think that's all it was?"

She grinned. "Oh, I know that's all it was. Sera, I've seen the way he looks at you. If he were a cartoon, he'd have hearts for eyes."

I smiled despite myself.

"If he's holding back," Maya continued, "it's not because he's not interested. It's because he doesn't want to hurt you or cross any lines, especially since he knows what you've been through. He was raised to control his instincts. If you want him...you might have to make the first—or second, I guess—move."

I hesitated. "You think I should?"

"I think," Maya said, reaching over and squeezing my hand, "that if you feel something for him—really feel it—you should give yourself a chance at happiness. You deserve that. After everything... You deserve to feel loved and wanted."

My throat tightened. "You make it sound easy."

“It’s not,” she admitted. “But I’ll be here. And I’ll be rooting for you every step of the way.”

I swallowed the lump forming in my throat and nodded.

Later, after Maya had passed out on my couch with an empty bag of pretzels on her stomach and her third beer bottle balanced precariously on the armrest, I tiptoed to my bedroom.

I sat on the edge of the bed, my phone in my hands. I stared at Lucian’s contact, my thumb hovering over the screen.

I didn’t want to overthink it. I didn’t want to scare him away, either.

After several drafts and deletions, I settled on something simple.

Sera: Thank you for last night. I keep thinking about it. I hope you got home safely.

I stared at the message for a few seconds before pressing send. Then I tossed the phone onto the bed like it might explode and buried my face in my hands.

Gods, I was a mess.

But a small smile tugged at my lips.

My phone buzzed less than a minute later, and Lucian's reply had my smile blooming into a full-on grin.

Lucian: I kept thinking about it, too. Can I see you tomorrow?

A giddy giggle spilled out of me as I tapped back a response.

The fluttery feeling in my stomach had nothing to do with the small sip of beer I'd had, and I couldn't remember the last time I'd felt this way about anyone.

But...I liked it.

And maybe, just maybe, this was the beginning of something real.