

My Sister 74

Chapter 74 SUSPENSION BRIDGE EFFECT

Lucian's sudden appearance froze me mid-step, and my body seized up.

My first instinct was to react—to explain something, anything—as though I'd been caught doing something wrong. Like a teenager whose parent had just walked into her bedroom at the worst possible moment, and her naked boyfriend was hiding out in her closet.

My pulse kicked into another gear as he came closer, my mind running wild with explanations for why my ex-husband was naked behind me and I looked kissed within an inch of my life.

But Lucian's expression wasn't suspicious. His gaze swept over me once, sharp and assessing, and then he sighed with relief.

"I'm so sorry I'm late," he said, stepping forward to wrap me in his arms. "More rogues showed up, and disposing of them took longer than I expected."

My stomach twisted.

Right. The rogues

While I was tangled up in Kieran's arms, Lucian had been dealing with his own chaos—fighting for me.

He could have gotten hurt, and here I was, flushed and guilty over a kiss I never should have let happen.

Especially mere hours after Lucian asked to be my boyfriend. My stomach churned, and I thought I was going to be sick.

I felt so fucking awful. What had gotten into me? Why had I let that happen?

“Are—are you okay?” I asked, forcing my voice to stay even. His familiar scent wrapped around me, and I closed my eyes, breathing him in, hoping it would banish the Kieran’s scent that had inundated my senses and wouldn’t leave.

Lucian gently pulled away but held me at arm’s length, and did one more once over. “Nothing I couldn’t handle.” His smile didn’t waver, but there was a shadow in his eyes that told me it hadn’t been as easy as he wanted me to think.

The guilt pressed heavier.

Just because Kieran was the one who got me out of the car didn’t mean he saved me any more than Lucian had by taking on those rogues at the restaurant.

And I’d...

Fuck!

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Lucian’s brows furrowed into a deep V. “What—”

His gaze shifted behind me, and I stiffened. I watched his eyes as he took in the dead rogues behind us. And naked Kieran.

But other than the sharp tick of a muscle in his jaw, his facial expression didn’t change.

“Kieran.” Lucian nodded, like back in the theater, except this time, the gesture looked stiff. Force.

Heat warmed the left side of my body, and I instinctively bit my kiss-swollen lips as Kieran’s deep voice rumbled through me. “Lucian.”

Lucian arched a brow. “You did this?”

“I would have left some for you if you hadn’t been so slow.”

My breath hitched at the obvious bite in Kieran’s voice, but Lucian took it in stride. One hand fell from my arm and reached out to Kieran. “Thank you for saving her.”

I ground my teeth so hard it would have been audible if the tension between both of them wasn't humming at a deafening volume.

"I didn't do you a favor," Kieran ground out.

Lucian's hand dropped to the side, and he nodded. "Still. Thank you. She's in safe hands now." The rest of his unspoken sentence was clear—Kieran could leave.

"Sera?" I flinched at the brusque way he said my name.

I forced myself to turn to him and exhaled softly—he was wearing a pair of grey sweatpants and a black T-shirt he must have had stashed in his car.

"I'm fine," I said softly. "Thank you—again."

His dark eyes flickered with something I felt deep in my chest, but he tore his gaze away the next second and stalked wordlessly to his car.

Lucian and I stayed seemingly suspended in time as we watched Kieran enter his car. The engine sputtered twice before it came to life.

I winced slightly as he drove past us. I'd ruined the G-wagon once with my blood, and now the bumper was ruined.

It felt like I was taking my first breath as I watched his brake lights shrink to the size of fireflies and then disappear altogether.

"Sera?" Lucian's gentle squeeze pulled me back to the present.

I sighed softly. "I'm glad you're okay."

Lucian's eyes softened at that, and for a moment I thought he'd ask more.

But instead, his attention shifted slightly, his gaze dipping over my body, pausing on my arms, my temple. I tensed.

I didn't know what I looked like. I couldn't feel the pain from the injuries anymore, but I could feel...an awareness. And from the look in Lucian's eyes, I got the feeling that maybe he could too.

I braced for the question.

It never came.

Instead, he nodded once, as if he'd noticed but decided not to pry. That somehow made me feel worse.

"You're not hurt, are you?" he asked anyway, his tone light but edged with that same quiet intensity that made me think he already knew the answer.

I shook my head a little too fast. "I'm fine. Really. Just tired."

"Good." He opened the passenger door of the Aston, holding it for me like the perfect gentleman. "Let's get you home."

The drive started out silent, save for the low purr of the engine. I watched the streetlights streak past in blurred ribbons, the rhythmic glow matching the uneasy beat of my heart.

I wanted to fill the air with something—anything—before the weight of unspoken things crushed me.

"Well," I finally said, forcing a crooked smile, "I'd say our first date was...eventful."

Lucian glanced at me, one brow raised in amusement. "That's one word for it."

I chuckled under my breath. "You don't think this is, I don't know...an omen, do you?"

That was apparently the wrong thing to say.

Lucian's foot slammed the brake pedal hard enough to send my body lurching forward. The seatbelt locked across my chest with a sharp bite, and I had to catch myself on the dashboard to keep from smacking my head on it.

"Lucian! What the hell?" I gasped, my heart in my throat.

He looked at me with an intensity so sharp it pinned me to the seat more effectively than any strap could.

"No," he said, his voice low and certain. "Not an omen. We will be happy together. I promise you that."

The certainty in his tone caught me off guard. It wasn't just confidence—it was conviction.

Like he'd already carved the future into stone and dared the universe to try to change it.

I blinked at him, momentarily robbed of words. "That's...a bold promise," I managed.

His gaze softened, though the stubborn edge didn't vanish. "I don't make promises I can't keep."

I wanted to ask what made him so sure—especially since there was a group of rogues who apparently had it out for me—but before I could, we were pulling into my driveway.

Lucian killed the engine and turned to me. “Do you need me to stay tonight? Just in case?”

Any other night, the offer would have been tempting. I thoroughly enjoyed Lucian’s company, but tonight, it offered guilt rather than comfort, and I desperately needed space.

Space to untangle my thoughts, to scrub the lingering feel of Kieran’s lips on mine and his hands on my skin.

Maybe if I could forget the kiss ever happened, then I could finally look Lucian in the eye.

“There’s no need,” I said, my voice careful. “I’m just going to go to bed.”

Lucian studied me for a moment, then nodded. “Alright. But I’m just a call away.”

Before I could thank him, he leaned in and pressed a soft kiss to my forehead. The contact was chaste, sweet—but it didn’t bring with it the rush of heat like Kieran’s kiss.

My stomach twisted so tightly with guilt I could barely breathe.

"I'll be better prepared for our next date," he murmured with a faint smile.

I managed a small one back. "I'm holding you to that."

He placed a hand to his chest. "Scout's honor."

I laughed softly, but it died in my throat when he took my hand and squeezed. "I really am sorry our date turned out like this, Sera. This was not the start I wanted to our relationship."

I smiled, even as the word 'relationship' felt like a boulder sitting on my lungs. "It's not your fault, and you protected me."

I leaned in and kissed his cheek. "Thank you."

"Always," he whispered.

I slipped out of the car before I could say or feel anything else I wasn't ready for. I didn't look back until I'd closed the door behind me.

The house was quiet, almost oppressively so. I didn't turn any lights on as I kicked off my sandals and made my way to the bathroom upstairs, my body heavy with exhaustion.

The shower was scalding hot, steam wrapping around me until the mirror fogged completely.

I scrubbed harder than necessary, like I could wash away the memory of Kieran's touch if I just applied enough pressure.

But no matter how many times I dragged the loofah over my skin, I could still feel him.

The press of his lips. The strength in his hands. The warmth of his skin. The heat of his arousal. The low, rough sound of my name breaking in his throat.

He'd been right—in the ten years we'd been together, we'd never had heat so potent as the two times we'd kissed since we divorced.

What sick fucking joke was that?

I leaned my forehead against the cool tile, water streaming down my back, and cursed under my breath.

When I finally stepped out, the bathroom felt too warm, the walls too close. Itoweled off, slipped into a loose T-shirt and shorts, and collapsed into bed with my phone in hand.

It was ridiculous. I knew it was ridiculous. But I still opened the browser and typed: 'Is it normal to have feelings for an ex-husband who never loved you?'

The results were depressingly varied. Articles, forum posts, personal blogs—all of them circling around the same core advice: 'Don't repeat past mistakes.' 'Remember why it ended.' 'People don't change overnight.'

I scrolled and scrolled, my chest tightening with each variation of 'you deserve better.'

They were right. Of course they were right.

Kieran had never loved me the way I deserved to be. He'd spent our entire marriage pining after my sister, and now that he had her—what—he wanted me?

I shook my head and turned off my phone, tossing it away like it was the cause of the tight knot twisting in my chest.

Tonight wasn't about Kieran. It wasn't even about me in the way it felt. It was science. Psychology. A neat little phenomenon called the suspension bridge effect. Heightened arousal from fear and danger could trick you into attributing that adrenaline to attraction.

That was it. That had to be it.

I wouldn't entertain any other alternatives.

If Lucian had been the one to fight off those rogues, if anyone had, I probably would have felt the exact same way.

My body was wired for survival—for latching onto the person who'd just kept me alive. It didn't mean I wanted him.

I stared at the ceiling, telling myself over and over: Kieran is not the right choice. He has never been the right choice.

I thought about the quiet peace I'd managed to build in the months since the divorce—the sense of stability I'd fought tooth and nail for. The idea of throwing all that away over one stupid, heat-fueled kiss was unthinkable.

I wouldn't. I couldn't.

I rolled to my side and closed my eyes, trying to breathe evenly.

The sheets were cool against my skin, but not cool enough to erase the phantom heat that still lingered underneath my skin.

I desperately willed sleep to break through the tangle of thoughts and emotions to claim me.

Tomorrow, I told myself, I'd wake up and put all of this behind me.

I just had to survive tonight first.