

## My Sister 76

Chapter 76 STRANGERS THAN SISTERS

SERAPHINA'S POV

The moment I saw Celeste's reflection in the spa's gilt-edged mirror, I knew the peace was over.

Her golden hair swayed like she had a personal wind machine following her, and the laughter spilling from her lips wasn't just loud—it was performative.

Flanking her were Abby and Emma, all three carrying the smugness of people used to having the world bow at their feet.

Maya's hand was still on mine from when they'd walked in. The squeeze she gave me was subtle, but the message was clear: Brace yourself.

We were invisible for the first ten glorious seconds—until Abby's gaze landed on me. Her steps slowed, her mouth curled. And then the performance began.

"Oh my God," she gasped, the sound dripping with disbelief. "Seraphina Lockwood. You're alive?"

Emma followed with a hand clasped dramatically to her chest. "Oh, what good luck! I heard she was attacked by rogues—again." She lingered on the last word as though it tasted bitter.

I kept my eyes on the warm water swirling around my ankles, the scent of citrus and sandalwood grounding me.

My first instinct was to pretend I didn't hear them. I had no intention of feeding the fire. Not today.

I just wanted to have a relaxing spa day, dammit!

But Abby and Emma had never been the type to let silence stop them.

"I mean," Abby continued, tilting her head toward Emma like they were performing for casting directors, "at some point, it's just bad luck. Or maybe..."

She lowered her voice just enough to make everyone else in the spa who had turned their attention to them when they walked in unconsciously lean in. "Maybe she's just making it up for attention."

Emma feigned a gasp so over-the-top it could have won awards. "You think so?"

"I don't know," Abby said with mock innocence. "But, you know, twice in such a short time? And then there was the shooting? What are the odds? Unless she's just trying to get people's attention—specifically, a certain Alpha."

They didn't have to say Kieran's name for the job to land.

I took a slow sip of cucumber water, my grip a little too tight on the glass.

'Ignore them, Sera,' I told myself sternly. 'Don't give them the satisfaction.'

Emma's voice pitched higher. "You're right! Like, oops, I almost died, please come save me again!"

"Gosh, it's like she's auditioning for a tragedy every other week."

"And the worst part? She's not even being original about it. Like, come on, it's always rogues? Be a little more creative, you know?"

Both of them burst into laughter like hyenas in designer sandals.

The water in Maya's footbath splashed as she shot to her feet.

"Okay, that's enough," she said, her voice carrying the kind of deadly calm that was infinitely more dangerous than shouting.

Abby and Emma turned to her, feigning confusion. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me.” Maya straightened to her full height, robe falling open just enough to reveal the sharp lines of muscle in her legs. “You want to throw shade, do it where it belongs—on yourselves.”

Abby’s nostrils flared. “We’re just talking.”

“No,” Maya said, taking a deliberate step closer. “You’re putting on a pathetic show that, honestly, could use a little work, and for what? Because your queen needs her two puppets dancing around to make her feel important?”

Between them, Celeste pursed her lips, her expression readable. It was odd that she hadn’t joined in their little performance earlier, and that she wasn’t clapping back now.

Emma’s mouth fell open, and Abby’s eyes narrowed. “We’re just pointing out the obvious. She keeps conveniently getting hurt, so Kieran has to save her. He divorced her for a reason, and—”

“Yeah,” Maya shot back, “and yet he still keeps her location tracked, shows up when she’s in danger, and paints the streets with blood to keep her safe. Doesn’t exactly scream ‘I can’t stand you,’ does it?”

That stopped them cold for a half-second.

Maya pressed on. "If anything, it sounds to me like he regrets letting her go."

My heart thudded painfully in my chest at that ludicrous insinuation.

I wanted to pull Maya back, to tell her not to give them more ammunition, but a small, secret part of me savored watching their perfect little composure crack.

Abby's lips parted in outrage. Emma muttered something under her breath to her friend, too low for me to catch.

"I think," Abby said slowly, "you should watch your mouth."

Maya's face darkened, and she took a step forward, looking as formidable barefoot in a bathrobe as she would in her fighting leathers. "Is that a threat, princess?"

Abby's gulp was audible as Maya leaned in, and her voice dropped low. "Because I promise you, you don't want to go down that path with me."

Okay, that was my cue to intervene.

I was half out of my chair now, ready to pull Maya back before the situation went nuclear, when Emma's lip curled. "Maybe we should just—" Her gaze flicked to me—then sharpened into something meaner. "Teach her a little lesson for wasting everyone's time with her drama."

They both took a step forward, and Maya's hands clenched into fists. "Your plastic surgeon is going to be very wealthy when he's done reconstructing your faces," she growled.

And then—shockingly—Celeste's voice cut through. "Stop"

It was soft but laced with steel. Abby and Emma froze instantly, like someone had hit the pause button on their remote controls.

Abby blinked. "But—"

"I said stop." Celeste's tone was...different. Not dripping with her usual saccharine mockery, not charged with open hostility. Just firm.

She crossed the space between us with deliberate grace, every eye in the room locked on her.

She was the picture of unruffled perfection—white wrap dress, diamond drop earrings, not a single hair out of place.

Her gaze was fixed on me, and I frowned at the expression on her face—soft.

“I heard what happened,” she said. “Kieran told me when he got home yesterday.”

My jaw automatically clenched. Guaranteed, Kieran didn’t tell her everything that happened yesterday, or I’d be having my hair pulled out right about now.

The gnawing guilt I’d felt in the period following Celeste walking into that hotel room after Kieran and I were together swirled in my stomach.

“I’m... glad you’re okay, Sera.” She chuckled softly at the surprise that crossed my face. “Really, I am. If anything had happened to you, Daniel would have been devastated.”

What knocked the air out of me wasn’t the uncharacteristic concern for me that Celeste was showing; it was her words.

My instinct was to dissect every syllable, looking for the hook beneath the bait. I would never forget the venomous threats she’d made to me in the hospital after I got shot.

‘So maybe I’ll take Daniel as my own. Raise him properly. As my son.’

‘How would you like that, Sera? Danny calling me mommy?’

Is that what this was? Another thinly veiled threat? If something happened to me, would she take my son?

Try as I did to see beneath her veil, all I found was perfectly measured sincerity.

Somehow, that was more unnerving than anything else.

“Thanks,” I said quietly, my voice coming out clipped.

I didn’t want to prolong this. I didn’t want to stand here in a robe with wet toes and talk about my near-death experience with a woman who had spent the better part of my life delighting in my misery.

They could have the spa; I was going home.

I started to turn away, but Celeste’s voice followed. “Wait.”

I stopped. Slowly faced her again.

“I wanted to apologize,” she said.

My eyes widened as an incredulous sound fell from Maya. Abby and Emma were looking at their Queen bee like she’d sprouted horns.

But Celeste ignored everyone, her gaze focused on me as she continued.

“For what happened at the party. Things...got out of hand.” She exhaled like she was bracing herself. “I went too far.”

My jaw unhinged. I didn’t think in all Celeste’s twenty-eight years I’d ever heard her admit fault, let alone apologize for it.

Who the fuck was this, and what had she done with my frosty sister?

“And I hope... I hope you’ll come visit Mom sometime. She truly wishes for harmony in the family. It would mean a lot to her.”

For a moment, all I could do was stare at her.

Because I didn’t know this Celeste.

I was used to the spiteful, bitter Celeste.

This one was polished, diplomatic, the words fitting together like she’d rehearsed them in the mirror.

And yet...there was no warmth in her eyes.

Not even the faint flicker of sincerity that would have made her performance believable.

But somehow, that lack of genuineness made the situation more bearable.

She was playing another angle, I was sure of it. I didn't know what it was yet, but I knew I wanted no part in it.

"Celeste," I said finally, "I think it would be better—and safer, honestly—for both of us if we just treated each other like strangers from now on."

A shadow crossed her face, quick but noticeable. "But you're not a stranger. You're my sister."

I would have laughed if she hadn't looked so serious. But again, her words lacked any warmth or sincerity.

"We're better off strangers than sisters."

I turned away before she could say anything else. Maya was already gathering her bag, her glare still burning holes in Abby and Emma.

We didn't wait to finish our pedicures, or even change back to our regular clothes—we just left.

The spa's air gave way to the cooler breeze of the mall, and I felt my shoulders drop an inch, tension leaking away now that we were out of their line of sight.

We had barely reached the parking lot when my phone buzzed in my robe pocket. I fished it out, expecting maybe a text from Lucian checking in.

It wasn't.

The screen lit up with a name I had never seen on my phone before.

Leona Blackthorne.

I hesitated for one beat before answering.

"Sera." Her voice was sharp with urgency, skipping pleasantries. "We need to talk."