

My Sister 84

Chapter 84 PURGATORY

KIERAN'S POV

The Blackthorne name meant something in every corner of the world, but here—on my island—it meant ownership.

Musha Cay stretched before us in glimmering white sand and crystalline turquoise shallows, the kind of paradise people paid hundreds of thousands to rent for a weekend.

Palms bent in the trade winds, manicured pathways gleamed like something out of a resort brochure, and discreet cameras tracked every angle.

Sentinels sworn to protect my son with their lives stood at invisible checkpoints, blending into the foliage, their presence silent but absolute.

The yacht had docked smoothly, crew jumping to secure lines. I stepped onto the pier with the practiced ease of someone who'd done this a hundred times, but my eyes weren't on the scenery or the staff lined up in crisp uniforms. They were on her.

Seraphina.

She was kneeling, Daniel's arms around her neck as though he'd never let go.

Our son's laughter carried over the water, bright and unguarded, tugging at something deep inside me. His bright eyes looked at her as though she were his whole world.

For the first time, I could see the toll their separation must have had on them, and guilt knotted in my stomach.

I knew I should join them, hug Daniel, and reunite with my family.

But something kept me rooted to the spot until Daniel's voice reached me.

"Dad!"

Truth be told, I'd been a little...concerned about Daniel's reaction when he saw me, considering the strain on our relationship these last couple of months, but that concern melted away under the warmth of his bright smile as he pulled away from Sera and barreled straight into me, his laughter ringing out.

I caught him mid-sprint, lifting him off the dock as he wrapped his arms tight around my neck.

My chest clenched as I pressed a kiss to his hair, inhaling the sun-warmed scent of him. "Missed you, champ."

"I missed you more!" he declared, pulling back to grin widely at me.

Behind him, Sera stood a step back. She looked composed, chin lifted, but the faint stiffness in her posture betrayed her.

Her hands smoothed Daniel's shirt even as she watched me hold him, something unreadable flickering across her face.

Before I could linger on it, the familiar perfume of my mother's roses swept in. "Kieran," she breathed, her arms open wide as she came toward me.

I set Daniel down just as my mother reached me. She wrapped me in an embrace that, despite her elegance, still carried the unyielding strength of a Luna. "My son. You look..." Her astute grey eyes narrowed. "...tired."

"I'm fine, Mother," I assured, forcing a faint smile.

"Fine," my father repeated, his voice rougher, skeptical as he came up beside me. He clasped my shoulder in a grip that was both steady and scrutinizing.

His sharp eyes scanned me as if reading the truth beneath my skin. "You've lost weight."

“I haven’t,” I said smoothly. “The sea air isn’t kind, that’s all.”

My mother cupped my cheek, frowning. “Tell me, how are things with the pack? And—” her pause was deliberate, too deliberate— “with Celeste?”

I felt Sera’s gaze on me, though she pretended to be occupied adjusting Daniel’s collar.

“Things with the pack are...stable,” I said, voice even. “Nothing you need to concern yourself with. As for Celeste,”—I kept my tone clipped, measured, giving nothing more than what courtesy demanded— “she’s fine.”

My mother arched a brow, not satisfied. My father crossed his arms, his silence heavier than words.

I cocked my head slightly, a little put off by their countenance. They’d always been huge supports of Celeste; why were they acting so...off?

“Mom!” Daniel piped up suddenly, bouncing on his heels as he gripped her hand. “I want to show you everything! Come on!”

Sera’s lips pulled into a beautiful, bright smile, and the thought that she’d never directed that kind of smile my way made my chest twist.

She let him tug at her hand, casting me a brief, unreadable glance before letting Daniel lead her down the path.

I watched them go, hand in hand, Daniel's little voice full of pride as he played tour guide. The twisting in my chest sharpened and deepened.

My mother followed my gaze, then returned her eyes to me, sharper now. "He adores her," she said simply. "That child hasn't smiled like that in weeks."

"She's his mother," I replied, my voice coming out slightly hoarse.

She nodded and remarked casually, almost conversational, "Seraphina raised him well. He's an amazing child."

"He is."

And I knew I could take none of the credit. Daniel was an amazing child because Seraphina was an amazing mother—simple as that.

She'd given him all the love and care she had lacked. She hadn't seen our family as a trap or some sort of punishment for our mistake. She'd genuinely tried to make the best of her new life.

And I made that life a cold hell.

And now that she was free of me, I didn't even have the decency to back off.

I'd dreamed of her last night, her touch, her lips. I'd woken with a hunger I had no right to feel, kissed her with a recklessness that belonged to another man entirely.

And she'd bitten me, shoved me away with steel in her voice.

'Keep your distance, Alpha.'

My jaw tightened.

"I'm going with them," I announced lowly. "Please see to it that our luggage is deposited in our rooms."

I didn't wait for my mother's reply as I took off down the path, but her knowing glance lingered, as tangible as the heat of the sun on my neck.

The island unfolded in luxury as Daniel tugged Sera from one marvel to the next. He wanted to show her everything: the glass-bottomed lagoon where stingrays drifted, the infinity pool that spilled into the sea, the shell-shaped cabanas scattered along the private coves.

His little voice bubbled with excitement, narrating details only a child would notice—how the hammocks swung higher if you kicked just right, how the butler always brought him coconut water with a straw shaped like a dolphin, how the sand crabs scurried sideways like they were racing each other.

Sera listened to every word, crouching down to his level, laughing when he grabbed her hand to pull her faster along the white-sand paths.

Her hair caught the sunlight, her smile bright but...fragile, like she was afraid to let herself bask too much in this fleeting peace.

And me? I followed at a distance. Watching. Wanting. Regretting.

I should have been at her other side, holding her free hand. I should have been making her laugh, putting smiles on her face.

But the only look I ever put on her face was the conflicted loathing like the one she'd worn back in my cabin when I'd kissed her.

Finally, the sight got too much, the ache in my chest too painful, so I retired to my room.

Much later, when the sun had begun its descent and painted the sky in bruised purples and molten gold, I went looking for Daniel.

The staff had retreated, dinner preparations underway, and the island quieted with the lull of evening.

I followed the sound of voices down a winding trail that led to a small pavilion by the water.

And then her voice stopped me in my tracks.

“...I know, sweetheart. I know you wish things were different.”

Daniel’s voice wavered, fragile. “I just...I still want you and Dad together.”

The words hit me harder than any blow. I pressed back against the wall, out of sight but able to see their outlined silhouettes.

Sera’s tone was gentle, patient, steady as the tide. “I understand, my love. Truly, I do. But sometimes, parents can’t be together the way children wish. It doesn’t mean we don’t love you. Nothing will ever change that.”

There was a pause, broken only by the lap of waves against the shore. Then Daniel, quieter: “Did Dad...did he hurt you? Because of Celeste?”

My breath locked. Shame burned hot under my skin. What kind of monster had I painted myself out to be that my son would even ask that kind of question?

But Sera—gods bless her—didn't falter.

"Danny, baby, your dad would never, ever hurt me."

Something inside me swelled at the conviction in her voice. She didn't sound like she was only trying to convince him; she sounded like she truly believed that.

"I don't mean like that," Daniel replied, sniffing. "I mean, did he make you sad?"

I clenched a fist, deflating at that question. I knew she wouldn't be able to answer with the same conviction.

There were worse ways to hurt someone other than physically.

Sera exhaled, tucking a strand of wind-blown hair behind his ear. "Daniel, there are things adults do that children don't need to bother themselves with. What matters is this: I'm strong enough to take care of myself. And I'll never let anyone hurt me—or you. Ever again."

Her words sank into me like a stone dropped into deep water.

'Strong enough.'

She was right.

Seraphina was stronger than I'd ever given her credit for. All those years I'd told myself she was fragile, dependent, easy to dismiss...

Convenient lies.

Daniel sniffled. "But I don't want you to be alone."

Sera pressed a kiss to his forehead, holding him close. "I'm not alone. I have you. And you have both of us. Even if Dad and I aren't together, we'll always be your family. Always."

Always.

The word burrowed deep within me, offsetting an ache that suddenly made it hard to breathe.

I slipped away before they could spot me, my chest tight, my thoughts louder than the crashing surf.

I'd told myself for years that Sera was the mistake, that Celeste was the dream. But standing on the balcony overlooking the endless sweep of the Caribbean, I couldn't escape the truth clawing through me.

Sera had raised our son with patience I'd never mastered.

She had endured the chill of a marriage where my affection never reached her, not because she lacked the strength to leave, but because she refused to let Daniel grow up in the shadow of our mistake.

And I? I'd been the child. Petulant, sullen, blind.

When I closed my eyes, I saw her again: the way she'd looked at me this morning when I'd kissed her, fire and hunger colliding in that one perfect, devastating instant.

Her lips had trembled under mine, her breath had caught—she'd wanted me. For one reckless heartbeat, she had wanted me.

And then she'd pushed me away.

For Daniel. For herself. For the self-respect I'd burned years ago.

The sting of her bite still lingered on my lips, the taste of her on my tongue, a phantom I couldn't chase away. My body ached with the memory of her pressed against me, even as my mind screamed at the impossibility of it.

Celeste's name whispered through my conscience, cold and accusing. The future I'd once promised her now looked like a hollow shell compared to the fierce, unyielding longing I felt every time I looked at Sera.

Which woman did I truly want? The one I'd convinced myself was my salvation? Or the one I'd cast aside only to find, years later, that she was a hidden gem I'd never been bothered to unearth?

I dragged a hand over my face, every nerve thrumming with confusion.

I wanted to storm back to that pavilion, to tell Daniel the truth, to beg Sera to look at me the way she had once, long ago, before everything curdled between us. But I didn't.

Because she'd told me to keep my distance. And for once in my damned life, I had to respect her boundary.

Even if it killed me.

Musha Cay was supposed to be paradise. Tonight, it felt like purgatory.