

My Sister 87

Chapter 87 I'VE LET GO

SERAPHINA'S POV

Daniel was warm in my arms when I tucked the covers around him later that night.

"Mom?" His voice was small, barely above a whisper. His lashes fluttered as though he were already half-asleep, but I knew my son—his mind never rested easily.

"Yes, love?" I smoothed his hair back, needing the steady rhythm of the motion more than he did.

"Are you okay?" His dark eyes blinked open, wide and searching.

The question hit deeper than I expected, pulling tight against the ache I'd carried all day.

I hesitated. My throat still felt raw from the water I'd swallowed, from the moment everything had gone black under the sea.

And behind my ribs, my heart kept replaying the terrifying seconds between sinking and waking—only to find myself nestled under Kieran, his mouth pressed to mine.

The memory burned like a brand. The way his breath had rushed into me, the way his hands had trembled as though he feared he might lose me.

I forced the it down, pushing it deep where Daniel couldn't see it in my eyes.

"I'm fine," I told him, the lie tasting like the salt of the ocean. "Just a little shaken, sweetheart."

His mouth curved into a sleepy smile. "Good. 'Cause I don't like it when you scare me."

I laughed softly, though the sound broke around the edges. "I'll try not to make a habit of it."

He reached out, catching my hand. His fingers were small but strong, his grip stubborn in that way he'd inherited from his father.

"You were with us all day," he murmured, already drifting. "It was the best."

My heart squeezed. He wasn't wrong. Despite the near-tragedy, the rest of the day after lunch had been something rare, something beautiful.

I'd never been part of the Blackthorne family vacations before. They'd always gone without me—Kieran, Daniel, Leona, Christian, the perfect picture.

And me? I was the invisible mother, the shadow left behind, the woman whose absence no one seemed to notice.

But today had been different.

Daniel's laughter had carried over the beach, ringing brighter than the gulls. He'd made sure we stayed away from the ocean, but he'd dragged me from the shade to show me seashells, we'd built sandcastles, chased crabs, and Kieran had even let us bury him up to his shoulders in the sand.

And despite the lingering tension between me and Kieran, Daniel's joy had spread like wildfire, catching even Leona and Christian in its glow.

For the first time, I hadn't felt like an outsider with my own family.

I bent and kissed Daniel's forehead, lingering longer than I meant to. "Sleep well, my love."

He sighed, his chest rising and falling in a steady rhythm as he finally gave in to slumber. I slipped my hand from his and stood, the soft creak of the mattress marking my retreat.

The villa was quiet as I padded into the hallway. A warm breeze pushed through the open windows, carrying the scent of sea brine.

I was still lost in thought—still reliving the strange, dizzying collision of relief and humiliation on that beach—when a voice startled me.

“Seraphina?”

I turned, my guard snapping up instinctively. Leona stood at the end of the hall, a shawl drawn loosely around her shoulders, her expression unreadable.

“Yes?” I asked cautiously.

She motioned toward the lounge, a quiet alcove with white wicker chairs and a low table set with untouched tea. “Do you have a moment? I’d like to...have a chat.”

Every instinct in me screamed ‘No!’ Previous conversations with Leona always ended with me questioning my self-worth and fighting back tears.

But politeness, or maybe exhaustion, made me nod. “All right.”

I followed her into the lounge, the air heavy with the scent of hibiscus and jasmine from the garden beyond. We sat opposite each other, the space between us feeling wider than the ocean outside.

For a moment, neither of us spoke.

Then, Leona broke the silence, voice soft. “I wanted to ask how you’re doing. After this morning. That was frightening.”

I blinked. Genuine concern? From Leona?

“Well, it’s a general principle of mine not to die by drowning,” I said dryly. “But I’m managing.”

Her lips twitched, almost a smile. “You always do.”

I folded my hands in my lap, wary. “Was there something else?”

She looked at me for a long beat, then nodded slowly. “Yes. I wanted to tell you... Daniel is a remarkable boy. Bright, kind, grounded. You’ve done a wonderful job with him, Seraphina.”

The compliment landed like a stone thrown into still water, rippling outward until it unsettled everything in me.

My first instinct was suspicion. Because kindness from Leona—as rare as a blue moon—had always come with an edge.

My second was something I didn't want to name, something dangerously close to longing.

How much easier would my life have been if just one of the maternal figures in my life had treated me with kindness, instead of contempt?

"Thank you," I said stiffly. "But Daniel's goodness is his own."

Leona shook her head. "Don't diminish what you've given him. It shows. The way he looks at you, the way he carries himself—he knows he is loved."

I shifted uncomfortably, my hands twisting together. This was too strange, too disarming. I wanted to get up, to make an excuse about being tired.

But before I could rise, she pressed on.

"I've also heard," she said carefully, "that you...may have someone new in your life."

My jaw tightened. Of course. There it was—the true reason for this midnight conversation.

I wasn't even surprised that she'd somehow acquired this information. Her sources were limitless—maybe Kieran himself even told her.

Though the idea of my ex-husband and ex-mother-in-law discussing my love life was more unsettling than this conversation.

Leona's eyes searched mine. "If that's true, then I'm glad. Truly. You deserve to be happy. You deserve support. Love. I hope this works out for you, Sera."

I let out a breath, sharp and humorless. "Forgive me if I don't leap to accept your good wishes."

Her brows drew together. "Why?"

"Because," I said flatly, "we both know what this is about. You're afraid I'll circle back to Kieran. You're afraid my presence here means something it doesn't. Let me spare you the anxiety: I'm not here to reclaim him. I've moved on. I have friends. I have someone who cares for me. My life now is so much better than it was as Kieran's wife. I'm happy now. Content."

Leona's face tightened, but I didn't stop. The words, once started, poured out like a tide I couldn't hold back.

"The only bond between me and your family now is Daniel. That's it. Whatever choices Kieran makes about his future, about who he wants to marry, or start a new family with—that's none of my business. I won't pry. I won't interfere. I've. Let. Go."

Silence filled the lounge, heavy and crushing. Leona's gaze held mine, sharp and searching, but I didn't flinch. For once, I refused to.

I rose, smoothing my hands down the sides of my shorts, eager to end this charade. “If that’s all, Leona, I’ll take my leave. Goodnight.”

I turned—and froze.

Kieran stood at the doorway.

His frame filled it, broad shoulders shadowed by the dim light spilling from the hall. His eyes, unreadable and piercing, locked on me. I couldn’t tell how long he had been standing there, or how much he had heard.

But my pulse stuttered all the same.

KIERAN’S POV

I hadn’t meant to linger in the doorway. I hadn’t meant to listen. But the moment Sera’s voice drifted into the hall, something in me stilled.

Her words cut deeper than I’d expected. ‘I’m not here to reclaim him. I’ve moved on. I have friends. I have someone who cares for me. My life now is so much better than it was as Kieran’s wife. I’m happy now. Content.’

Each sentence felt like a nail hammered into my chest. I should have been relieved—this was what I'd once wanted, wasn't it? Distance. Separation. An ending to the miserable, tangled bond between us.

Yet hearing her so resolute, so distant, so completely certain she wanted no part of me anymore—it hollowed me out.

She turned, and her eyes collided with mine.

For a moment, neither of us moved. Her lips parted, maybe in surprise, maybe in anger. The lamplight from the lounge cast her in pale gold, her face flushed with the remnants of her talk with my mother.

I wanted to say something—anything—but my throat locked.

She brushed past me without a word, her perfume—faint and achingly familiar—clinging to the air.

My hand twitched as if to reach for her, but I kept it clenched at my side.

'I've. Let. Go.'

It was better this way.

My mother exhaled softly, looking up at me from her perch. “You heard her, didn’t you?”

I turned my head just enough to acknowledge her. Her posture was stiff, eyes cautious.

“This is good, Kieran,” she said gently. “It means you two can coexist without tearing each other apart. That’s good. For Daniel’s sake. For yours.”

Good.

My mother would think so. Like everyone else, she’d hated Sera, been cold to her. She’d said she’d die before relinquishing the Luna title to her.

Instead of answering, I just nodded.

That seemed enough for her. She rose, smoothing down her blouse, and offered me a small, tight smile. “It’s the best outcome for everyone.”

‘Best for everyone except me,’ I thought bitterly, but didn’t say it aloud.

When she left, silence pressed in. The villa felt cavernous at night—the waves distant, the air thick with salt and heat. I walked back to my room, each step heavier than the last.

I should have felt relieved. But all I could think of was how Sera had looked when she said she was content. That flash of defiance in her eyes. That quiet certainty.

And me? I felt anything but content.

In my room, I poured myself a glass of scotch, but it tasted like acid. I sat at the edge of the bed, elbows on my knees, staring at the dark ocean outside the window.

For years, I'd told myself the right path was clear: marry Celeste, the woman I'd chosen, the one who was beautiful, charming, socially, and politically aligned.

The one who hadn't cost me my reputation. Who hadn't been forced into my life by disaster and duty.

Sera was supposed to be the wrong choice.

So why, after all this time, did being near her feel more right than anything else ever had?

The memory of her unconscious on the beach earlier slammed into me. The panic. The sound of her cough when life returned to her.

The way her wet shirt had clung to her body—reminding me of her softness, her warmth, everything I wasn't supposed to want.

The way she'd pushed me away.

I dragged a hand down my face, muttering a curse. I needed control. I needed order.

Celeste.

That was the answer. I had to remind myself what I was building toward. She was stability. She was the match that made sense.

I picked up my phone before I could second-guess myself and found her name. It only rang once before she answered.

"Kieran?" Her voice was breathless, excited. "I was just thinking about you!"

I closed my eyes, pressing my fingers against my temple. "How are you?"

"Oh, you know me." I could hear the smile in her voice. "I've been keeping busy. Pilates in the mornings, brunches with my friends, a little shopping"—yeah, my bank account knew all about her shopping spree—"did you know they've just released the most divine emerald collection at Cartier? It made me think of the ring I'll be wearing soon." She laughed, high and light.

I swallowed hard. “Celeste—”

“And you? How’s the island? I wish I were there. You must look so handsome against the ocean backdrop.” Her tone softened, honey dripping over every word. “I miss you.”

She always said the right things, always painted the picture we were supposed to fit into. A perfect pair, admired, envied, destined.

But as she spoke, all I could see was Sera kneeling on the sand, helping Daniel bury me, cheeks flushed, laughter bright and unrestrained.

“I...miss you too,” I forced out, though the words felt like gravel in my mouth.

Celeste gasped softly, delighted. “I can’t wait until you’re back. We’ll plan the engagement announcement, the party, everything. It’s going to be perfect.”

Perfect.

The word lodged in my throat like a splinter.

I made the right noises—agreed when she wanted me to, chuckled when she teased—but inside, I felt the emptiness widening.

When the call finally ended, she was glowing, dreaming aloud about our future. I was left staring at my reflection in the blackened window, the glass of scotch untouched beside me.

I'd done what I told myself I should. I'd reached for order. For the path I'd chosen. For the woman who represented everything safe, everything logical.

And yet, I'd never felt further from myself.

Because the truth was, no matter how many times I told myself to do the right thing—my fucking heart wasn't listening.