

My Sister 96

Chapter 96 DROP THE ACT

SERAPHINA'S POV

For a moment, the floor tilted underneath me, and coupled with the sour and heavy remnants of the conversation with my mother clinging to me, I thought I was going to be sick all over the spotless linoleum floor.

I closed my eyes, took two long, calming breaths, and opened them—to the same nauseating sight.

Celeste and Kieran—entwined like lovers who hadn't seen each other in years, her hands hooked behind his neck, his arms anchored firmly around her waist.

My fingers curled into fists, nails biting crescents into the flesh of my palm.

The thing is... It wasn't even the fact that Kieran was kissing Celeste; it was the fucking kiss itself.

The way he gripped her and pressed her into him, the expert, hungry way his lips glided over hers.

The way it made me think of all the other times Kieran had kissed me, and I felt so absolutely, completely, fucking stupid.

My stomach roiled again, and it felt like I was back on that stupid yacht battling seasickness, except this time the idea of throwing myself overboard to the mercy of the sharks felt much more palatable than staying on the ship.

But amidst the gut-wrenching feeling of betrayal I didn't want to examine too closely, came something like...relief.

Because I'd been right—Kieran was exactly who I thought he was.

His attentiveness and care on the island were a charade. His kisses and touches were farces.

If I'd been a lesser woman, if I didn't have a decade of cold indifference as reference, I might have been fooled into thinking he really cared about me, that he truly wanted me.

But in the end, the truth would always prevail—Kieran would always choose Celeste.

I scoffed. In a way, that realization was oddly liberating. I never had to bother about the confusing storm in my head about Kieran, because ultimately, he had never been mine, and he would never be—it was that simple.

The sound I made must have been louder than I intended, because at that moment, Kieran's eyes fluttered open—then blew wide as his gaze caught mine over Celeste's shoulders.

He shoved Celeste back so abruptly she stumbled, lips still parted, cheeks flushed. I might have laughed at the comical shock on her face if I wasn't too busy trying to keep the coffee and bagel I'd had on the plane down.

"Sera—" Kieran's voice cracked, caught somewhere between surprise and alarm. Something like guilt flittered in his eyes.

His gaze swept over me in an instant, lingering on my eyes. "You're crying."

Was I? I held my hand up to the corners of my eyes and felt the moisture there. Interesting. Had that happened in my mother's room or after I stepped out?

"What happened?" Kieran pressed. "Did Margaret—is it serious?"

Concern. His tone dripped with it, as though he was still the Kieran who fussed over me when I was seasick and sucked snake venom out of my injury and carried me up the stairs and cooked for me and—

A bitter laugh clawed its way out of my throat before I could stop it. I blinked back what felt like another wave of hot tears, refusing to examine the dull ache pounding against my ribcage.

"Sera—"

I jerked away from his touch so violently I almost lost my footing—but the memory of what had happened the last time I tripped around Kieran burned so brightly in my mind, my body instinctively righted itself.

“Why don’t you ask Celeste?” I snapped, tearing my gaze to my sister, who leaned against the wall, her arms crossed, watching the exchange with glacial blue eyes.

“Celeste,” I hissed, my voice as sharp as glass, “is it serious? Did Mom—who looked surprised as fuck to see me in her hospital room—really ask for me?”

Celeste’s face tightened, but she rolled her eyes, dismissive and theatrical. “Are you serious right now, Sera?”

“Excuse me?”

“I called you because I figured you’d be worried, but you’re mad because Mom’s fine?”

I blinked, scoffing incredulously. “I’m not mad because Mom’s fine—I’m glad she’s fine. I’m mad because you—”

“I guess it’s not that hard to understand, though.” She shrugged.

My eyes narrowed. “What the fuck does that mean?”

Her lips curled into that saccharine smile that had always hidden poison. “You resent everyone. You always have. And after ruining everything ten years ago, it must gut you to see everyone happy and healthy, right? You just can’t stand it that Mom is healthy and that I’m happy with the man who was mine all along. Your selfish, callous heart can’t—”

Muscle. Memory.

My palm connected with her cheek before I’d even fully processed the thought. The sharp crack echoed in the sterile hospital hallway, drawing curious glances.

Celeste’s head snapped to the side, her hair falling loose around her face.

“Don’t you dare,” I hissed, my voice trembling with fury. After dealing with actual snake venom on the island, I wasn’t much interested in Celeste’s special brand.

“Don’t you dare spill all that bullshit about me again. I’ve had just about enough of that.”

Her hand shot up immediately, eyes blazing as she moved to strike me back. But Kieran caught her wrist mid-air, his jaw set.

“Enough!” he snapped, his voice carrying unquestionable authority. “Not here. Not outside Margaret’s room.”

Celeste yanked against his hold, her eyes wild with indignation. “You’re defending her? After she just—”

Kieran’s grip only tightened. “This isn’t the time or place.”

My gaze cut to him, cold as ice. “It’s okay, Kieran, you can drop the act now that we’re back in the real world. I know you don’t really care.”

His eyes flickered, and he actually looked genuinely wounded. That tiny fracture almost unsettled me. Almost.

But Celeste pounced on it. “Care?” she repeated, her tone sharp. Her eyes darted between us, narrowing with suspicion. “What’s going on? Did something happen between you two on the island?”

The silence that followed was suffocating.

My lips pressed into a thin line—I would be damned if I opened my mouth to repeat any of the illicit things that had happened between me and Kieran in that villa.

He, too, apparently had the same sentiment. His jaw ticked, his gaze darting away unfocused.

And Celeste—oh, Celeste knew exactly what our silence meant.

Her face twisted in rage. She lunged forward, grabbing my wrist with her free hand in a bruising grip. “Don’t you dare,” she seethed. Her voice was low, venomous. “Don’t you dare try anything. I finally have the chance to be engaged to Kieran. You think I’m going to sit back this time and watch you take what’s mine? I swear, if you ruin this for me again, Seraphina, I will destroy you and everything you hold dear!”

I stared down at her hand clamped over mine.

‘What’s mine...’

Did she ever see Kieran as anything other than a possession? Gods, she sounded like I’d stolen her favorite toy, not the man she was supposed to love and cherish.

Whatever. I didn’t give a flying fuck about the dynamics of their relationship.

I slowly wrenched myself free. “If he matters to you that much,” I said, my voice dropping to a mocking lilt, “then you should be careful not to provoke me further.”

She blinked, jerking her head back. Unable to stop myself, I went in for the kill. “Because if you push me hard enough, Celeste, maybe I’ll decide to steal him away just for the fun of it.”

I threw a glance at Kieran, making sure Celeste could see the suggestive look in my eyes. “After all, I already did it once before, and trust me, hon, doing it again is not as hard as one would have thought.”

Her gasp was immediate, loud, strangled. Kieran stiffened as his wide-eyed gaze took me in, his expression nothing short of shock.

“Sera—” His voice was raw, as if my words had rattled him.

As if he wasn’t the one shoving me against walls and counters and asking me not to kiss him back because he couldn’t help himself.

Celeste screeched, the sound so sharp it turned the heads of passing nurses. She surged forward, nails curling, clearly intent on tearing at my face.

Kieran caught her again, pinning her arms to her sides as she thrashed. “Stop it, Celeste!” His voice thundered, his Alpha aura rumbling through the air. “She’s just venting—can’t you see that?”

“Venting?!” Celeste shrieked. “She’s threatening me! She’s planning to ruin everything again, and you’re just standing there! Fuck that, you’re letting her!”

I stood rooted, breathing hard, the adrenaline burning in my veins. My hands shook, still tingling from the satisfying contact of Celeste’s cheek.

I half wanted Kieran to let her go. Let her come at me.

Words hadn't been enough to get my messages through to her. Maybe if I body-checked her against the wall and gave her a concussion, she'd know to stay the fuck away from me.

And then—

“Seraphina.”

The voice was cool, measured, familiar. It blasted away the heat and anger rushing through my veins, replacing it with a warm, reassuring comfort I only ever experienced in one person's presence.

Lucian.