

Chapter 10

Sylas had spent all morning preparing for his sister's visit. He'd mopped the floors, pulled out the dusty old couch from storage, and put on a pot of stew so they could have lunch together.... And now she was late, and he was anxiously pacing by his front door as he waited for her to arrive.

Was she even coming?

They hadn't spoken since his fight with Peter, and he had no way to know if she even still wanted to see him after what had been said.

She was always urging him to get along with the man. Maybe this had been the last straw for her....

Sylas kicked a stone by his foot and retreated back into his home, stalking to the kitchen to turn off the stew and collapse in a chair at the dining table.

He shouldn't have assumed she was coming.

He was a fool to think otherwise. A fool *and* an idiot.

He'd gotten in a fight with her husband. The man she'd *chosen* to be bound to and live with. While he was just her brother; someone she'd never had the choice of not-knowing. She probably wouldn't have ever spoken to him at all if she hadn't been born into his family.

For the last six years she'd had her own life with her own family, and Sylas was just... dead weight. Clawing at her ankle and pulling her down with him.

Sylas sighed and leant over to rest his head on his arms.

He supposed there *was* a reason Amelia had married Peter and moved out as soon as she'd turned eighteen. He was lucky she hadn't cut him off completely.

Though, maybe that was happening, now....

It wouldn't be undeserved. He had been treating her poorly for years, and she alone had carried the burden of holding what was left of their relationship together....

'Sylas?' Amelia's voice cut in, and the man leapt to his feet.

'Amelia?!' he exclaimed, turning to his sister. 'Amelia! I thought you weren't coming! I thought— That you.... After the fight...'

She smiled at him, her tired eyes creasing at the edges. 'The carriage was running late. That's all. No reason to fret.'

A moment of hesitation, and then Sylas grinned and opened his arms for a hug. 'I'm so glad you could come.'

'So am I,' Amelia agreed, returning her brother's embrace. 'It's meant a lot that you've been wanting to see me lately. I've really missed you.'

Sylas felt his heart turn— If it was a twist or a flutter he wasn't sure. The knowledge that she'd missed him was both a breath of relief and a stab of guilt.

'Oh! Oh!' Amelia pulled back from the hug, and grabbed Sylas by the hand. 'They're kicking! Quickly! Right here! Right here! Can you feel it?'

He could.

He *could* feel the kick.

'*Oh my gods,*' he breathed. 'Oh— Oh my gods! That's them? That's— *Oh....*'

‘Isn’t it amazing?’ Amelia asked, her eyes sparkling as she looked down at her own belly. ‘They’re so strong already, and they’ve not even been born.’

‘Oh my gods,’ Sylas repeated; it was all he could manage.

He couldn’t believe he’d missed so much of this until now....

‘Did your stove go out?’ Amelia asked, suddenly, and Sylas looked up from her belly to see her craning her gaze towards the half-cooked pot of stew. ‘That can’t be safe.’

‘Oh, no, I put it out,’ Sylas admitted, feeling his cheeks burn in a blush. ‘I thought you weren’t coming, so...’

‘You’re such a silly thing,’ Amelia giggled, pecking a kiss on her brother’s cheek before making for the stove and relighting it. ‘I love you, Sylas. Please try not to forget that.’

‘I promise I’m trying,’ Sylas sighed. ‘But it is easier said than done— Amelia, no! Leave the dishes. They’re my responsibility.’

Amelia didn’t argue as Sylas took the plate she had begun to clean and set it back down on the bench. No; instead she seemed relieved and let herself be sat down at the table so Sylas could take over the work.

‘Sorry. Thanks,’ she said with a nervous chuckle. ‘It’s just habit.’

Habit? Sylas almost snorted as he scraped down a plate. *It shouldn’t have been habit — Not right now. Not in the state she was in.*

If Peter was making her labour when she was *this* heavily pregnant, Sylas was going to kill the man!

‘So, when do I get to meet this girl of yours?’ Amelia’s question pulled Sylas out of his simmering, and he placed down the scourer to turn to her. ‘I *have* to meet the girl who managed to break down *your* walls! What did you say her name was, again?’

‘Morel,’ said Sylas. ‘She’s... she’s wonderful. I think you’d like her.’

‘I think I would, too,’ Amelia leant her chin on a hand. ‘I can see how happy she makes you.’

‘You can?’ Sylas asked. ‘Really?’

‘Mhm,’ Amelia gave a nod. ‘You’re opening your curtains, again.’

Sylas took pause, at that.

He hadn’t even thought about the fact he’d drawn back the curtains to let light in. Today had just seemed like such a nice day to welcome the sun.... But he realised that his sister was right. Every time she had visited in the past six years, it had always been *her* to draw back his curtains and talk about how miserable the dark house seemed....

‘It’s... a nice day,’ Sylas finally managed, much to Amelia’s humour.

The woman covered her mouth and shook her head as she looked to her brother, eyes sparkling. ‘*What’s so nice about it?*’ she teased, her voice deepening in a mocking tone.

Sylas realised she was mimicking *him* and gave a half-humoured sigh as she giggled.

‘So, when can I meet Morel?’ Amelia asked again. ‘Does she live nearby? Maybe we could pop in and you could introduce me?’

‘She’s... close, yes,’ Sylas answered, biting his lip. ‘Though... I wouldn’t try and “pop” in. Her uh... her aunt’s a little bit.... Well....’

‘Mean?’

'Protective,' Sylas settled on. After all Morel had told him he wasn't ready to condemn Isseal or call her a bad person... even if he was terrified of her. Morel just spoke about her with too much love for him to think poorly of her. 'She doesn't approve of me. And honestly I don't blame her. I wouldn't approve of me, either.'

'Naw, Sylas...' Amelia opened her mouth as if she was about to argue, but then slowly closed it again; a pitying look passing over her as she let out a long breath through her nose.

She clearly knew she couldn't argue that he was in any way a desirable man. Not after he'd spent almost a decade making sure he wasn't.

'So...' Amelia gave a cough to clear her throat, and leant forward in her chair. 'What's she like? Morel, I mean.'

'Beautiful,' Sylas said with a sigh. 'Just... in every way. She's beautiful.'

'Hah...' Amelia's lips turned in a cheeky grin. 'It's been a long time since you've called something beautiful, let alone a person.'

'Mm...' Sylas gave a hum. Then, he felt himself returning his sister's grin. 'Hey. Do you want to go fishing?'

'Fishing?' Amelia echoed with a disbelieving laugh.

'After we've eaten,' Sylas clarified. 'We could take some cards with us and play a game, like we used to as kids. What do you think?'

'Sylas, I would *love* to!'