

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

Chapter 131 -140

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

My phone buzzes against my palm, Damien's name flashing on the screen. Emma glances over with those perfectly arched eyebrows, and I swipe to answer before she can make some snide comment.

"Hi."

"I'm downstairs. Where are you?"

"Coming down now."

The line goes dead, and something hot coils in my belly. Emma is still watching me with that curious expression.

"Have a lovely evening," she says with sweetness.

I grab my purse and walk past her without a word. Let her figure out what that was about.

The elevator ride feels endless. My reflection in the steel doors shows exactly what I expected—messy hair, wrinkled clothes, exhaustion written across every feature.

Damien's SUV is idling near the garage entrance, engine purring. He gets out when he sees me, and the sight of him makes my breath catch. Gone is the business suit from earlier. Now he's wearing dark jeans that hug his thighs and a gray sweater that does incredible things for his shoulders.

His eyes rake over me as I approach, and there's heat in that silver-blue gaze that makes me very aware of every inch of skin under my clothes.

"You look like heaven," he says when I reach him.

"Charming." But I'm fighting a smile. "Is that how you talk to all your dates?"

"Just the ones I'm planning to take to bed later."

My cheeks flush hot. "Presumptuous much?"

He opens the car door for me, leaning close enough that I can smell his cologne. “Am I wrong?”

I don’t answer, but the way my breath hitches tells him everything he needs to know.

The drive is torture. His hand rests on my thigh, thumb tracing lazy patterns through the fabric of my slacks.

Every casual touch sends sparks through my nervous system, reminding me exactly how long it’s been since we’ve done anything more intimate than quick kisses.

“Where are we going?” I ask when we turn onto an unfamiliar road.

“Somewhere with good wine and dim lighting.” Follow current novels on findnovel.net

“Planning to get me drunk?”

His fingers squeeze my thigh. “Planning to get you relaxed.”

The restaurant he’s chosen is all string lights and candlelit tables scattered across a stone patio. Romantic as hell. The kind of place that practically screams “anniversary dinner” to anyone with eyes.

The hostess greets Damien by name and leads us to a corner table that’s somehow even more intimate than the others. Flickering candles, trailing jasmine, the works.

“This is very…” I search for the right word as he pulls out my chair.

“Romantic?”

“I was going to say obvious.”

He laughs, the sound low and warm. “I’m not trying to be subtle tonight.”

“Good thing I like obvious men.”

“Do you?”

The way he’s looking at me across the candlelit table makes my pulse skip. “Sometimes.”

We order wine-something red and expensive that I definitely don’t deserve after the day I’ve had. The alcohol helps loosen the knots in my shoulders, makes the candlelight feel warmer instead of just pretty.

“So,” Damien says, swirling his wine. “Tell me about your day.”

“You mean besides getting locked in a closet by your perfect assistant?”

“Emma locked you in a closet?”

I wave a dismissive hand. “Storage room. And it was an accident. Supposedly.”

His jaw tightens almost imperceptibly. “How long?”

“About an hour. Long enough to watch you two have what looked like a very productive meeting”

“You were watching?”

“One-way glass.” I take another sip of wine. “You two make a good team.”

There’s something dangerous in his expression now. “Are you jealous, Sera?”

I laugh, but it sounds forced even to my own ears. “Maybe a little bit.”

“Because if you are, I could fire her tomorrow.”

“You will not fire her because I’m having an insecurity crisis.”

“I’ll fire her if she’s making my mate uncomfortable.”

The possessive note in his voice makes heat pool low in my belly.

“Forget about it, just an incident.”

The food arrives—some fancy pasta thing for me, steak for him. But I’m barely tasting. It’s because Damien keeps looking at me like he’s planning to devour me for dessert.

“You’re staring,” I point out.

“I’m appreciating. Being a patient man. I can wait until we get home to show you exactly how much there is to appreciate.”

My thighs clench involuntarily. “You’re terrible.”

“You love it.”

And damn him, I do. I love the way his eyes go dark when he looks at me. Love the way his voice drops to that rough whisper. Love the way he makes me feel like the most desirable woman in the world even when I’m falling apart at the seams.

“Take me home,” I say quietly.

“We haven’t finished eating.”

“I don’t care about the food.”

Something shifts in his expression. Heat flares in those silver eyes. “You sure?”

“Take me home, Damien. Now.”

He signals for the check without breaking eye contact. Pays quickly, efficiently, while I sit there trying to remember how to breathe normally.

The drive home is charged with a different kind of tension now. His hand stays on my thigh, but his touch feels possessive rather than casual. Claiming.

“The kids?” I ask as we pull into our driveway.

“Ophelia’s keeping them overnight.”

“You planned this.”

“I hoped.”

Inside, he doesn’t bother with lights. The moment the door closes, he backs me against it, his body caging me in. In the darkness, all I can see is the gleam of his eyes and the sharp line of his jaw.

“I’ve been thinking about this all day,” he murmurs against my ear.

“Just today?”

“All week. All month.” His hands frame my face. “Do you have any idea what you do to me?”

“Tell me.”

Instead of answering with words, he shows me. His mouth finds mine in a kiss that’s hungry, demanding, full of weeks of pent-up need. I kiss him back just as desperately, my hands fisting in his sweater.

When we finally break apart, we’re both breathing hard.

“Upstairs,” he growls.

But neither of us wants to stop kissing long enough to actually walk. He lifts me instead, my legs wrapping around his waist as he carries me toward our bedroom. We’re still kissing, still touching, stumbling slightly when he misjudges the hallway corner.

“Smooth,” I gasp against his mouth.

“Shut up.”

Our bedroom is dark except for moonlight streaming through the windows. He sets me down beside the bed, his hands immediately going to the buttons of my blouse.

We undress each other slowly, reverently, like we’re unwrapping something precious. When we’re both naked, he pulls me down onto the bed, his mouth finding all the places that make me gasp and arch beneath him.

Without our supernatural bond, I can’t feel his emotions or his wolf’s presence. But what I feel instead is somehow more intimate. More real. This is just us-Damien and Sera, skin against skin, discovering each other all over again.

When he finally moves over me, settling between my thighs, his eyes find mine in the moonlight.

“Happy anniversary,” he whispers.

“Happy anniversary.”

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

The morning light filters through our bedroom curtains, casting soft shadows across the hardwood floor. I’m curled up in the reading chair by the window, watching Lily sleep in her bassinet, when Damien appears in the doorway with two cups of coffee.

“You’re up early,” he says, crossing the room to hand me one of the mugs. His hair is still messy from sleep, and he’s wearing just sweatpants, his chest bare and distractingly perfect in the gentle morning light.

“Couldn’t sleep.” I wrap my fingers around the warm ceramic, grateful for something to focus on besides the knot of anxiety that’s been sitting in my stomach since yesterday. “Lily was fussy around three.”

“I didn’t hear her.” His brow furrows with concern as he settles on the edge of the bed across from me. “You should have woken me.”

“You need rest too. Besides, it’s not like you could have helped. She was hungry.”

He takes a sip of his coffee and studies me with those silver-blue eyes that seem to see straight through all my carefully constructed walls.

“I got a call from Riley yesterday,” he says finally.

My heart does something weird in my chest. “Riley?”

“From the training camp. She wanted me to pass along a message.” Damien’s voice is careful, like he’s walking through a minefield. “She and Lucas are getting engaged.”

The words slam into me like a punch to the chest. My heart does this weird little skip-part joy, part something that feels uncomfortably like grief. Of course Riley and Lucas are engaged. Everyone’s been waiting for them to figure it out for years. I should be thrilled.

“That’s wonderful,” I say, and I mean it. My voice only wobbles a little. “They’re perfect for each other. Really perfect.”

“They want you to come to the engagement party.” Damien sets down his coffee, his silver eyes studying my face. “They all do. The whole team has been asking about you.”

I feel the blood drain from my face. “Damien, I can’t-”

“Why not?”

“Last time I led that team, I almost got everyone killed.”

The memory hits me like a punch to the gut. The mission that went wrong six months before my capture. My tactical error that separated the team in hostile territory.

“That wasn’t your fault,” Damien says quietly.

“It was.” My hands are shaking now, the coffee mug trembling in my grip. “I made the call to split up. I chose the wrong route. If Marcus hadn’t-if they hadn’t been stronger than me, better fighters-”

“Sera.” Damien moves to the chair beside me, his hand covering mine on the coffee mug. “Everyone came home. Everyone was fine.”

“I failed them, Damien. And now I’m not even a wolf anymore. What could I possibly offer them now?”

I hear him stand, feel him move closer until his heat is a warm presence at my back.

“You could offer them the chance to see their friend again,” he says softly. “The chance to celebrate with someone they care about.” [READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT](#)

His hands settle on my shoulders, warm and steady. “Or you could be a reminder of how strong you are. How you survived something that would have destroyed anyone else.”

“They don’t even know,” I whisper. “About Ayla. About what I lost.”

“You won’t get pity from them.” Damien’s thumb traces along my collarbone, a gesture so familiar it makes my chest ache. “You’ll get respect. And love. And probably a lot of questions about why you waited so long to visit.”

I lean back against his chest, feeling some of the tension leave my shoulders as his arms wrap around me. Lily stirs in her bassinet, making soft baby sounds that tug at my heart.

“What if I go and everything feels wrong?” I ask.

“Then we leave.” His voice is matter-of-fact, like it’s the simplest thing in the world. “But you won’t know until you try!”

I close my eyes, breathing in his scent-pine and leather and something uniquely him that always makes me feel safer. Maybe he’s right. Maybe I owe it to Riley and Lucas to celebrate this moment with them. Maybe I owe it to myself to stop hiding.

“Okay,” I say finally, the word barely a whisper.

“Okay?”

“I’ll go.” I turn in his arms, meeting his gaze. “But if this goes badly, I’m blaming you.”

His smile is slow and devastating. “I can live with that.”

Three days later, I’m standing in the parking lot of the Training Facility, my hands clenched so tightly around my car keys that the metal is cutting into my palm.

“You can do this,” I mutter to myself, smoothing down the simple black dress I chose for today. It’s nothing fancy, but it’s clean and fits properly and doesn’t have any stains from baby spit-up. Small victories.

The front entrance slides open with a familiar hiss, and the scent hits me immediately. Not the human-filtered version I experience now, but still recognizable. Weapons oil and leather and the particular musk that comes from werewolves training at full intensity.

“Sera!”

I turn toward the voice and see Jake from communications jogging toward me, his face lit up with genuine excitement. The sight of his familiar grin does something to ease the knot in my stomach.

“Holy shit, it’s really you!” He pulls me into a bear hug that lifts me off my feet. “We heard you were back, but nobody’s seen you around. How are you feeling?”

“Better,” I say automatically. “Much better.”

“You look good.” His eyes are kind, but I can see the confusion there. The way he’s trying to figure out why something feels different about me. “Thinner maybe, but good.”

“Thanks.” I force a smile. “Congratulations to Riley and Lucas. I heard the news.”

“Yeah, finally, right? We all saw it coming from a mile away” Jake grins. “Come on, everyone’s in the main training hall. They’re going to lose their minds when they see you.”

He leads me through corridors that used to feel like home, past rooms where I spent countless hours honing my tactical skills and leadership abilities. Every step feels heavy, weighted with memories of who I used to be.

The training hall doors are open, and I can hear voices and laughter spilling out. My steps slow as we approach, anxiety spiking sharp and sudden in my chest.

“Hey everyone!” Jake calls out as we enter the room. “Look who I found!”

The reaction is immediate and overwhelming. Voices calling my name, people moving toward me with smiles and open arms. For a moment, it’s exactly like Damien said it would be—love and excitement and genuine happiness to see me.

Riley reaches me first, pulling me into a fierce hug that smells like vanilla.

“Oh my God, Sera! I’ve missed you so much!” Her voice is thick with emotion. “How are you? Really, how are you?”

“I’m okay,” I lie, hugging her back and trying not to think about how her enhanced strength makes me feel like a fragile human doll in comparison. “I’m so happy for you and Lucas. When’s the big day?”

“October maybe.” She pulls back to study my face, her expression suddenly concerned. “You look tired. Are you getting enough rest?”

Before I can answer, more team members gather around us—faces I recognize, voices I remember, people who used to trust me with their lives. They’re all so happy to see me, so genuinely excited, but I can feel their confusion too.

“Where’s Marcus?” I ask, scanning the room for the familiar bulk of our former specialist.

“Right here!” The voice booms from across the hall, and I turn to see Marcus approaching with two younger wolves trailing behind him. He looks exactly the same—broad shoulders, dark skin, easy grin that could charm anyone into anything.

“Sera!” Marcus pulls me into a hug that crushes the air from my lungs. “About damn time you showed your face around here. We were starting to think you’d forgotten about us little people.”

“Never,” I say, my voice muffled against his chest. “Just... recovering.”

“Well, you look fantastic.” He releases me and turns to the two younger wolves. “Tyler, Jenna, come meet someone special. This is Seraphina Nightshadow, our former team leader and the strongest female in our pack.”

The words hit me like a physical blow, even though I know he means them as a compliment. The strongest female. That’s what I used to be. What everyone still thinks I am.

I force my face into what I hope is a convincing smile as the newcomers approach.

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

The crowd around me is getting thicker, more voices joining in with questions and welcomes that make my chest feel tight. Just when I’m starting to panic about being trapped in the center of all this attention, a familiar voice cuts through the noise like a blade.

“Alright, alright, everybody back up!”

Riley appears at the edge of the crowd, pushing her way through with the determination of a woman on a mission. Her dark hair bounces as she elbows past Marcus and waves off the others.

“Give the girl some breathing room!” she commands, planting herself between me and the crowd.

“We’re just saying hi,” Jake protests, but he takes a step back.

“Well, you’ve said hi. Now shoo.” Riley makes shooing motions with both hands like she’s scattering chickens.

“Sera came here to see me!”

“But we haven’t seen her in months-” Tyler starts to say.

“And she’ll still be here in an hour,” Riley interrupts firmly. “But right now, we girls need some quality time together. Don’t we, Sera?”

Before I can answer, she wraps her arm around my shoulders in a protective gesture that makes my throat tight with gratitude.

“Go train or lift weights or whatever it is you do to feel manly,” Riley continues, waving the others away. “We have serious girl talk to catch up on.”

“Since when do you do girl talk?” Marcus asks with a grin.

“Since I got engaged and became disgustingly sentimental.” Riley’s cheeks flush pink, but her voice stays firm.

“Now scoot. All of you. We’ll catch up later.”

She guides me toward a quiet bench by the windows, settling beside me, turning to face me with a grin that could power half the territory, “I’ve been dying to talk to you about my engagement...”

She stops mid-sentence, her brow furrowing as she really looks at me. I can see the exact moment she realizes something’s different. Her hands tighten on my shoulders.

“You look tired,” she says softly. “Really tired. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” I lie automatically. “Just adjusting to life with a newborn.”

“Right! The baby!” Riley’s face lights up again like someone flipped a switch. “I want to hear everything!”

“She’s perfect. Beautiful and healthy and strong.” My voice catches slightly on the last word. “Damien’s completely smitten. And Adrian is the best big brother you’ve ever seen.”

“I bet he is. That kid has such a good heart.” Riley smiles. “Just like his mama. Now, I am literally bursting with good news and if I don’t tell someone soon, I’m going to explode.”

I find myself smiling. “Let me guess. This has something to do with Lucas?”

“Everything has to do with Lucas!” Riley throws her hands up dramatically. “God, Sera, I’m so disgustingly happy I don’t even recognize myself anymore.”

I laugh-actually laugh-for the first time in weeks. “That is pretty shocking. What’s next, you’re going to start liking romantic comedies?”

“Don’t even joke about that.” Riley shudders. “But honestly? I kind of understand them now. Like, when the guy does some grand romantic gesture and the girl gets all weepy? I used to think that was ridiculous, but now...” She sighs dreamily. “Now I think I might cry if Lucas brought me gas station flowers.”

“Oh no,” I tease. “You’re completely gone, aren’t you?”

“Completely and totally gone.” Riley grins. “And I don’t even care. He takes care of me, Sera. Nobody’s ever taken care of me before.”

“That’s incredibly sweet.”

“He’s incredibly sweet. Like, stupidly, impossibly sweet, Do you know what he did last week? I mentioned that I missed the cookies my mom used to make when I was little, just a random comment. And the next day he showed up with a whole batch that he’d spent all night learning to make from some recipe he found online.”

I feel a pang of longing so sharp it takes my breath away.

“He made you cookies.”

But he was so proud of them, and he’d worked so hard…” Riley dabs at her eyes again. “I ate every single one and told him they were perfect.”

“You’re so gone it’s not even funny.”

“I know!” Riley laughs through her tears. “And the best part is, he’s just as bad. Yesterday he called me beautiful while I was covered in mud from training exercises.”

“When did he propose?” I ask.

“Last weekend.” Riley holds out her left hand, showing off a simple silver band with a small, perfect diamond.

“We were on our morning run, and he just stopped in the middle of the trail and dropped to one knee right there in the dirt.” NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON [FindN\(\)vel.net](http://FindN()vel.net)

“Did you see it coming?”

“Not at all! I thought he was having a heart attack or something. I actually started to call for a medic before I realized what was happening.” Riley giggles. “He said he’d been carrying the ring around for weeks, waiting for the perfect moment, but then he realized there was no such thing as perfect. He just wanted to marry me as soon as possible.”

The ring catches the light as she moves her hand, simple and beautiful and exactly right for Riley.

“It’s gorgeous,” I tell her. “Perfect for you.”

“I love it so much. And I love him so much it’s actually scary sometimes.” Riley’s expression grows serious for a moment. “Is that normal?”

“That’s completely normal,” I assure her. “That’s how you know it’s real.”

“Good, because I was starting to worry I was losing my mind.” Riley brightens again. “But enough about me being disgustingly happy. I need to talk to you about something important.”

My stomach drops. “What kind of important?”

Riley bounces on the bench, practically vibrating with excitement. “We’re having an engagement party next week. Big party, everyone we know, dancing, drinking, the whole thing.”

“That sounds wonderful.”

“And I need you there!” Riley grabs both of my hands, her eyes wide and pleading. “I mean, I really, really need you there, Sera. This whole thing won’t feel real without my best friend celebrating with me.”

My chest tightens with anxiety, but the hope in Riley’s voice makes it impossible to say no.

“Of course I’ll be there,” I hear myself say. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

“Really?” Riley’s face lights up like the sun. “Really, truly? Because I was so scared you’d say you weren’t ready for parties yet, or that you were too busy with the baby, or-”

“Riley.” I squeeze her hands. “I’ll be there. I promise.”

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

The engagement party was a glittering nightmare wrapped in silk and champagne.

I clung to Damien’s arm like a lifeline as we moved through the crowded ballroom, my heels clicking nervously against marble floors. Crystal chandeliers threw rainbow light across hundreds of guests, all of them radiating the kind of supernatural confidence.

“You look stunning tonight,” he said, pressing a kiss to my temple. “Stop doubting yourself.”

I’d spent three hours getting ready, trying on four different dresses before settling on the navy blue cocktail number that Ophelia had picked out. My hair was pinned up in an elaborate updo that had taken twenty minutes of YouTube tutorials to master.

And I still felt like a fraud.

“I don’t recognize half these people,” I whispered as another group of impossibly elegant strangers glided past.

“Pack business brings in a lot of allies,” Damien replied. “You don’t need to know them. You just need to be yourself.”

A server materialized beside us with champagne, and I grabbed a glass like it might save my life. The bubbles burned my throat, but at least it gave my hands something to do besides shake.

“Sera!” Riley’s voice cut through the crowd like a beacon. She appeared in a vision of silver silk, practically glowing with happiness as she pushed through the sea of guests. “You came! Oh my God, you actually came!” Get full chapters from FindN0vel.net

She threw her arms around me with enough force to nearly spill my champagne, and for a moment I forgot about everything else. This was Riley. My friend. The reason I’d forced myself to come tonight.

“Of course I came,” I said, squeezing her back. “I promised.”

“You look absolutely gorgeous,” Riley gushed, holding me at arm’s length to study my appearance. “Doesn’t she look incredible, Lucas?”

“Beautiful as always,” Lucas agreed, appearing beside his fiancée with that easy smile that had charmed half might break. “How are you feeling, Sera? Really?”

“Good,” I lied smoothly. “Really good.”

“I can’t wait to meet Lily,” Riley said, her eyes sparkling. “When are you going to bring her around?”

“Soon,” I promised.

We chatted for several minutes about wedding plans and baby updates, the familiar rhythm helping to steady my nerves. But then other guests began approaching, drawn by Riley’s magnetic energy, and I found myself thrust into an endless cycle of introductions.

“This is Seraphina,” Riley would announce proudly. “Damien’s mate and one of my dearest friends.”

Handshakes that lingered as they unconsciously tested my strength. And then that momentary confusion when they realized I had no scent to speak of, no supernatural presence to mark me as one of them.

I watched person after person greet Damien with the subtle head tilts and barely perceptible inhalations that indicated scent-reading.

Then they’d turn to me and... nothing. Just awkward silence and poorly concealed disappointment.

“She seems nice,” I overheard one woman whisper as she walked away with her companion.

“I suppose,” the other replied with obvious doubt. “Though I can’t imagine what he sees in her.”

By the time the dancing started, my cheeks ached from forcing smiles and my feet throbbed in their impractical heels. Damien guided me to a relatively quiet corner near the floor-to-ceiling

windows, where we could watch couples glide across the polished dance floor with inhuman grace.

“You’re doing beautifully,” he said softly, his thumb tracing soothing circles on my hand.

“I feel like everyone’s staring at me.”

“They’re curious. It’s natural.”

“They’re wondering what’s wrong with me.” The champagne was making me honest, stripping away the careful politeness I’d been maintaining all evening. “They can all sense it, can’t they?”

Damien turned to face me fully, his silver eyes intense in the chandelier light. “Sera-”

“Damien!”

We both turned at the familiar voice, and my heart sank straight into my expensive shoes. Emma Rodriguez was walking toward us through the crowd, and she looked like something out of a fairy tale.

Tonight she wore an emerald green gown that hugged every curve of her perfect body, the backless design showing off smooth, flawless skin that seemed to glow in the warm light. Her dark hair fell in glossy waves over one shoulder, and she moved with the fluid confidence of someone who had never questioned their place in the world.

“Emma,” Damien acknowledged with cool politeness. “I didn’t expect to see you here.”

Emma’s gaze shifted to me, and I watched that familiar flicker of confusion cross her features. It was subtle- just a tiny wrinkle between her perfectly sculpted brows.

“Seraphina,” she said with practiced warmth. “How wonderful to see you again. You look lovely tonight.”

“Thank you,” I managed.

The band launched into a slow, romantic melody that had several couples drifting toward the dance floor.

Emma’s eyes lit up with what looked like sudden inspiration.

“Damien,” she said, turning toward him with a smile that could have powered the entire building, “would you like to dance? I promise I won’t step on your toes.”

“Thank you,” he said smoothly, “but I need to stay with my partner.”

Emma blinked, clearly not expecting the refusal. “Your partner?”

“My mate,” Damien corrected, his arm sliding around my waist to pull me closer against his side.

The change in Emma’s expression was immediate and devastating. Her smile froze, then cracked, then disappeared entirely as shock flooded her features.

“Your mate?” she repeated, her voice climbing an octave. “But you don’t smell like-I mean, there’s no mate scent on you at all!”

Several nearby conversations stuttered to a halt as heads turned in our direction, drawn by Emma’s rising voice and obvious distress. I felt heat flood my cheeks, then spread down my neck and across my chest until I was sure I was glowing with humiliation.

“Seraphina is my mate,” Damien said, his voice dropping to that dangerous alpha tone that made lesser wolves show their necks. “She has been for over a year.”

Emma’s mouth fell open in a perfect ‘O’ of shock. She stared at me like she was seeing me for the first time, her eyes wide with disbelief and something that looked uncomfortably like pity.

“I... oh my God,” she stammered, her professional composure crumbling before our eyes. “I’m so sorry. I always thought she was your nanny,” she blurted out in a rush.

The silence that followed was absolute and crushing. I felt every single person in our immediate vicinity turn to stare at me—really stare—taking in my simple dress, my lack of obvious pack markings, my complete absence of the supernatural aura that marked every other woman in this room.

The blood drained from my face so fast I thought I might faint right there on the marble floor. My champagne glass trembled in my hand, the crystal singing softly as my fingers shook.

The band played on, couples continued to dance, waiters circulated with champagne and canapés.

And I stood in the center of it all, exposed and humiliated beyond anything I’d ever experienced.

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

The silence stretched on for what felt like hours, though it couldn’t have been more than a few seconds. Every face in our immediate vicinity was turned toward me, and I could practically feel their judgment crawling across my skin like insects.

“I need some air,” I said quietly, my voice sounding strange and distant even to my own ears.

Damien's grip on my waist tightened. "Sera--"

"Please." I looked up at him, and whatever he saw in my expression made him release me immediately. "I just need a minute. Don't follow me."

I walked away before he could protest, pushing through the crowd of elegantly dressed guests who watched me go with poorly concealed curiosity. Each step taking me further from the warm glow of the ballroom and deeper into my own humiliation.

The French doors leading to the terrace were mercifully unlocked. I stepped outside into the cool night air, grateful for the relative quiet and the absence of staring eyes. The terrace overlooked the gardens, where fairy lights twinkled among perfectly manicured hedges and fountain bubbled softly in the distance.

I gripped the stone balustrade and tried to breathe.

"Your nanny." The words echoed in my head like a broken record. "I always thought she was your nanny."

God. How many other people thought the same thing? How many conversations had happened behind my back, people wondering why the powerful Alpha Damien Nightshadow kept some random human woman around his house?

The worst part was that Emma's mistake wasn't exactly unreasonable,

I was just... ordinary. Human. Forgettable.

A soft breeze rustled the leaves in the garden below, carrying with it the distant sound of laughter and music from the party inside. Riley's engagement party. The celebration I'd promised to attend, the night that was supposed to help me feel normal again.

Instead, I felt more isolated than ever.

I closed my eyes and tried to center myself the way I used to when Ayla was part of me. But there was no warm presence in the back of my mind anymore, no fierce wolf spirit to lend me strength. Just empty silence where my other half used to be.

"Pull yourself together," I whispered to the night air. "You're being ridiculous."

But the words felt hollow. Because deep down, I knew Emma was right to be confused. What was I doing here, playing dress-up in fancy clothes and pretending I belonged in this world? I wasn't a Luna anymore. I wasn't even a wolf.

The French doors opened again, and this time I heard multiple sets of footsteps. Guests were starting to spill out onto the terrace, probably looking for quieter spaces to continue their conversations.

I should go back inside. Find Damien. Make polite excuses and leave before I embarrassed myself further.

That's when it happened.

A young server appeared from nowhere, carrying a tray loaded with champagne flutes. He was moving quickly, probably trying to refill glasses for the guests who'd wandered outside. But something went wrong- maybe he caught his foot on the edge of a decorative planter, maybe he just misjudged the distance between tables.

Whatever the cause, he stumbled forward with a startled yelp, the tray tilting dangerously as he fought to regain his balance.

Time seemed to slow down as I watched twelve crystal glasses slide toward the edge of the silver tray. If I'd still been a wolf, my enhanced reflexes would have kicked in automatically. I would have moved faster than humanly possible, either catching the server or diving out of the way with supernatural grace.

Instead, I stood there like a statue, my purely human reaction time far too slow to save me from what was coming.

The tray hit the stone terrace with a crash that seemed to echo across the entire garden. Crystal shattered, champagne exploded in every direction, and I went down hard, my expensive heels sliding out from under me on the suddenly slick stone.

I hit the ground with a thud that knocked the air from my lungs, champagne soaking through my carefully chosen dress and pooling around me in a puddle of humiliation. Broken glass glittered in my hair, and the sticky liquid burned my eyes.

"Oh God!" the server gasped, dropping to his knees beside me. "Ma'am, I'm so sorry! Are you hurt? I'm so, so sorry!"

But his voice was drowned out by the sound of footsteps as every guest on the terrace rushed toward the commotion. I could hear exclamations of surprise, concerned murmurs, the rustle of expensive fabric as people gathered around to gawk at the spectacle I'd become.

I tried to push myself up, but my hands slipped on the wet stone and I went down again, this time with even less dignity. Champagne dripped from my hair, my dress was completely ruined, and I was pretty sure I had glass embedded in my palms.

"Someone help her up!" a voice called out.

"Is she bleeding?"

"What happened?"

I finally managed to get to my hands and knees, though the position made me feel even more pathetic.

Champagne continued to drip from my clothes, forming a growing puddle beneath me.

That's when Emma stepped forward, her voice carrying clearly across the suddenly silent terrace.

"Excuse me!" she called out to the server, her tone sharp with outrage. "How dare you show such disrespect to the Alpha's mate!"

My head snapped up in horror. No. She wouldn't. She couldn't—

"I don't care how clumsy you are," Emma continued, her voice growing louder with each word. "You cannot treat Damien's partner this way, even though she's only human now!"

The words hit the crowd like a bomb.

Only human now.

The whispers started immediately, a susurrus of shocked voices that seemed to come from every direction at once.

"Human?"

"Did she say human?"

"But how can an Alpha mate with a human?"

"That's not possible."

"Unless she wasn't always human..."

I closed my eyes, wishing the stone terrace would open up and swallow me whole. But Emma wasn't finished.

"Everyone step back," she commanded, moving toward me with exaggerated concern. "Give her some space. She's probably hurt, and without her wolf healing..." She let the sentence hang in the air like a loaded weapon.

Without her wolf healing. Find the newest release on [find—novel.net](http://find-novel.net)

The confirmation hit the crowd like a second wave of shock. I could hear the whispers growing louder, more incredulous.

"She lost her wolf?"

“How is that even possible?”

“What kind of mate loses their wolf?”

“Their children...” someone said, their voice dropping to a horrified whisper. “Their children must be filthy half-breeds.”

The blood drained from my face so fast I thought I might pass out right there on the champagne-soaked terrace.

“That’s disgusting,” another voice chimed in. “Mixing pure Alpha blood with human genetics. What was he thinking?”

“The bloodline will be tainted forever.”

Each word was like a dagger through my chest. I tried to stand, desperate to escape, but my legs wouldn’t support me. The champagne had made the stone surface treacherous, and without supernatural balance or strength, I was helpless.

Emma crouched down beside me, her face a mask of perfectly performed concern that didn’t quite reach her eyes.

“Let me help you,” she said sweetly, though her voice was loud enough for everyone to hear. “I know this must be so difficult for you. Being human in a world of wolves... raising mixed-blood children without the strength to protect them properly...”

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

The moment Sera walked away from me, something in my chest went tight and cold. I watched her push through the crowd toward the terrace doors, her shoulders rigid with the kind of tension that meant she was barely holding herself together.

“Fuck.”

I wanted to follow her. Every instinct I had was screaming at me to go after her, to pull her into my arms and fix whatever was broken. But she’d asked me not to follow, and I’d learned to respect that request over the past few months.

Even when it killed me.

“Damien?” Emma’s voice pulled my attention back to the immediate disaster. She was standing there looking mortified, her perfect composure finally cracked. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to—I had no idea she was your mate. I just assumed—”

“You assumed wrong,” I said flatly, not bothering to hide the ice in my voice.

Emma flinched. “Of course. I can see that now. It’s just, without the mate bond scent, I thought.”

“Stop talking.”

The words came out with enough alpha authority to make her step back involuntarily, her wolf instinctively recognizing the danger she was in. Smart woman.

I was about to go after Sera when a familiar voice interrupted.

“Damien, my boy!”

I turned to see Henry approaching, one of the pack’s most senior members and Lucas’s great-uncle. The old man was built like a linebacker despite being in his seventies, his silver hair perfectly groomed and his expensive suit tailored to accommodate his still-impressive frame.

“Henry.” I forced a smile, though it felt like my face might crack from the effort. “Good to see you.”

“Likewise, son, likewise.” He clapped me on the shoulder with enough force to stagger a normal human.

“Beautiful party, isn’t it? Young love and all that.”

“Yes, Riley and Lucas seem very happy.”

“They do indeed. Reminds me of myself at that age.” His pale blue eyes twinkled with mischief. “Speaking of which, I’ve been meaning to have a word with you about your own situation.”

My stomach dropped. “My situation?”

“Your bachelor status, of course!” Henry gestured around the crowded ballroom. “Look around, son.

Everyone’s pairing off, settling down, building families. Even my great-nephew finally figured out how to propose to that lovely girl of his.”

I really, really didn’t want to have this conversation. Not tonight. Not when Sera was somewhere outside, probably crying because of what just happened.

“Henry, I appreciate.”

“Now, I know you’ve been focused on pack business,” the older man continued, clearly not interested in being interrupted. “And that’s admirable. But a strong alpha needs a strong luna by his side. The pack expects it.”

My jaw clenched so tight I thought my teeth might crack. “The pack expects what, exactly?”

“A proper mating, of course! Pure bloodlines, strong offspring, all the traditional requirements.” He leaned closer, his voice dropping to what he probably thought was a conspiratorial whisper. “Between you and me, I’ve been wondering why there’s no mate scent on you. Are you having trouble finding a suitable female?”

The urge to grab Henry by the throat and explain exactly why there was no mate scent was overwhelming.

“I’m not looking for a mate right now,” I said carefully.

“Nonsense!” Henry waved a dismissive hand. “Every alpha needs a luna. It’s the natural order of things. And I have to say, that Rodriguez girl has been making quite an impression tonight. Intelligent, attractive, excellent breeding...”

My vision went red around the edges. “What did you just say?”

“Emma Rodriguez,” He clarified, apparently oblivious to the dangerous shift in my mood. “The kind of female who could be both luna and business partner. Very practical arrangement.”

My voice dropped to that lethal whisper that made grown wolves show their necks. “I already have a mate.”

The old man blinked in confusion. “You do? But there’s no scent.”

“I have a mate,” I repeated, each word precise and deadly. “I have a wife. I have two children. And if you suggest I abandon them for some ‘practical arrangement’ with anyone else, I will end this conversation in a way you won’t enjoy.”

His face went pale as he finally registered the alpha power radiating from me. The air around us seemed to vibrate with barely contained violence, and I saw several nearby guests step back instinctively.

“Of course,” he stammered. “I didn’t mean any offense ”

“Then don’t give any.”

Without another word, I turned and stalked toward the terrace doors. Sera had been out there too long, and my patience for polite conversation had reached its absolute limit.

But as I approached the French doors, I realized something was wrong. Very wrong.

There were too many people gathered on the terrace. Too many voices raised in excitement or concern. And under it all, I could hear something that made my blood turn to ice.

Sera's voice. Quiet, strained, trying to calm someone down.

I pushed through the crowd with enough force to send several guests stumbling, my enhanced senses immediately cataloging everything wrong with this scene. The sharp smell of spilled champagne. The glitter of broken crystal scattered across the stone. And there, in the center of it all—

Sera.

On her hands and knees in a puddle of champagne, her hair hanging in wet strands around her face, her dress completely soaked. She was trying to push herself up but kept slipping on the wet stone, her purely human reflexes and strength failing her.

The sight of her like that—vulnerable, humiliated, struggling—unleashed something primal in me that I'd never felt before. Not just anger. Not just protective fury. This was pure, undiluted rage that made my bones ache with the need to destroy something.

“What happened?” I snarled, dropping to my knees beside her without regard for my own expensive suit.

“I'm fine,” Sera said quickly, but her voice was shaking. “It was an accident. The server tripped, and I just happened to be in the way ”

“Ma'am, I'm so sorry!” A young man in server's uniform was hovering nearby, his face white with terror. “I didn't see you there! I'm so sorry!”

I barely glanced at him. All my attention was focused on getting Sera off this damn terrace and away from all these staring faces. I could feel their gazes like physical weights, pressing down on us with curiosity and judgment and poorly concealed amusement. The rightful source is [Find\[N\]ovel.net](http://Find[N]ovel.net)

“Let me help you,” I murmured, sliding one arm around her waist and the other under her knees.

“Damien, I can walk—”

“No, you can't,” I said firmly, lifting her against my chest with infinite care. “Your dress is soaked, and there's glass everywhere.”

“It's fine,” Sera said quietly, probably trying to defuse the tension she could feel radiating from me. “Really, it was just an accident. Don't blame anyone.”

I carried Sera through the ballroom, not caring about the wet champagne soaking into my suit or the way conversations stopped as we passed. All that mattered was getting her home, getting her safe, getting her away from all these people who looked at her like she was some kind of fascinating specimen.

The car ride was silent except for the soft sound of Sera's breathing and the hum of the engine. She sat pressed against the passenger door, staring out the window at the passing streetlights. Her hands were folded in her lap, and I could see the tension in every line of her body.

"Talk to me," I said finally.

"Nothing to talk about." Her voice was carefully neutral. "It was an accident. People spill things. It happens."

"Sera."

"Really, Damien. I'm fine."

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

The house felt too quiet when we finally made it home.

Damien carried me straight upstairs, setting me down gently in our bedroom like I was made of spun glass. My champagne-soaked dress clung uncomfortably to my skin, and I could still feel tiny shards of crystal embedded in my hair.

"Let me help you out of that," he said softly, his fingers already reaching for the zipper at my back.

I caught his hands, stopping him. "I can manage."

"Sera—"

"I'm fine, Damien. Really." I forced what I hoped was a convincing smile. "It was just an accident. People spill things at parties all the time."

His silver-blue eyes searched my face, and I could see he didn't believe me for a second. But after a moment, he nodded.

"I'll check on the kids," he said. "Make sure they got settled okay."

"That sounds good."

He lingered in the doorway for a moment, like he wanted to say something else. Then he was gone, his footsteps echoing down the hallway.

I peeled off the ruined dress and dropped it in the hamper, then stood under the shower until the water ran cold. But no amount of soap could wash away the memory of those whispers, those stares, the look of pity on Emma's face.

"Their children must be filthy half-breeds."

"What kind of mate loses their wolf?"

"The bloodline will be tainted forever."

By the time I emerged from the bathroom in my pajamas, Damien was back. He'd changed into sweatpants and a t-shirt, his hair still damp from his own shower.

"Adrian's fast asleep," he reported, settling on the edge of the bed. "Lily went down without a fuss. Nanny said they were perfect angels all evening."

"Good." I sat at my vanity, running a brush through my wet hair with mechanical precision. "I'm glad they had fun."

"Sera." His voice was gentle but firm. "We need to talk about what happened tonight."

My hand stilled on the brush. "What's there to talk about?"

"Everything." He stood up, moving behind me so I could see his reflection in the vanity mirror. His hands settled on my shoulders, warm and reassuring.

Damien's voice turned bitter. "Apparently, the pack expects me to find someone with better breeding."

The brush clattered to the vanity top as my hands started shaking. "Maybe they're right."

"What?"

I turned to face him, wrapping my arms around myself like armor. "Maybe they're right, Damien. Maybe you do need someone better."

"Don't." The word came out sharp as a blade. "Don't you dare start doubting yourself because of what those people said."

"Why not?" The words tumbled out faster than I could stop them. "They weren't wrong, were they? I'm not a wolf anymore. I can't protect our children. I can't even attend a party without humiliating myself."

"What you are is my mate. The mother of my children. The woman I love more than my own life."

“I’m a human, Damien.” The words tasted bitter. “A weak, ordinary human who can’t give you what you need.”

“You give me everything I need. Sera-”

I wanted to believe him. God, how I wanted to believe him. But the voices from tonight wouldn’t stop echoing in my head.

“I should go to bed,” I said quietly, pulling away from his touch. “It’s been a long day.”

Damien studied my face for a moment, then nodded. “Okay. We’ll talk more tomorrow.”

“Sure.”

We settled into bed with careful distance between us, like we were both afraid of what might happen if we touched. Damien’s breathing evened out after about twenty minutes, but I lay there staring at the ceiling, my mind racing.

When I was sure he was deeply asleep, I turned onto my side to watch him.

Even in sleep, he looked powerful. The line of his shoulders under the thin t-shirt. The strong column of his throat. His face, relaxed and peaceful in the moonlight streaming through our windows.

He was beautiful. Perfect. Everything an alpha should be.

And I was just... me.

“He deserves better,” the little voice in my head whispered. “He deserves someone who can stand beside him as an equal. Someone who can give him strong children and help lead the pack.”

I slipped out of bed as quietly as I could, padding barefoot down the hallway to Adrian’s room. The door was slightly ajar, and I pushed it open just enough to peek inside.

My little boy was sprawled across his twin bed, one arm flung over his stuffed wolf, dark hair falling across his forehead. He looked so peaceful, so innocent.

“His silver-blue eyes,” I thought. “Just like his father’s. He’s going to be a strong alpha someday.”

But what kind of mother would he have? A human woman who couldn’t protect him? Who would only hold him back?

I moved down the hall to the nursery, where Lily slept in her crib.

“You’re going to be amazing, little one,” I whispered, reaching down to stroke her soft cheek. “You’re going to be everything your father is and more.”

My throat tightened with unshed tears. “But you need a mother who can guide you in that world.”

Lily stirred slightly at the sound of my voice, her tiny fist curling around my finger with surprising strength.

“I love you,” I breathed. “I love you both so much.”

Damien deserved a real mate. A luna who could help him lead the pack, who could give him children without genetic complications, who could stand beside him at events like tonight without embarrassing him.

Adrian and Lily deserved a mother who could protect them properly. Who could teach them about their wolf heritage. Who wouldn’t be a liability when they needed her most.

And I...

I deserved to stop pretending I belonged in a world that no longer had room for me.

I made my way back to our bedroom, slipping under the covers as quietly as I’d left. Damien didn’t stir, lost in whatever dreams alphas had. Read complete version only at OveFind.net

“I could do it,” I thought, staring at his sleeping face. “I could leave. Find somewhere quiet to start over. He’d be sad for a while, but eventually he’d realize it was for the best. He’d find someone worthy of him. Someone who could give him everything I can’t.”

The idea should have horrified me. Should have sent me scrambling to wake him up and beg for reassurance.

Instead, it felt almost... peaceful.

Like setting down a burden I’d been carrying for too long.

“Tomorrow,” I decided.

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

Morning light filtered through our bedroom curtains like it was any other day. Like the world hadn’t shifted on its axis while I lay awake all night, making the hardest decision of my life.

Damien stirred beside me, his arm tightening around my waist in that unconscious gesture that used to make me feel so safe. Now it just made my chest ache with what I was about to lose.

“Good morning,” he murmured against my hair, his voice rough with sleep.

I turned in his arms, memorizing the way his eyes looked in the soft morning light. Silver-blue and warm with contentment. He had no idea this would be the last time he’d wake up with me beside him.

“Morning,” I whispered back, pressing a kiss to his chest.

His hand cupped my face, thumb stroking along my cheekbone. “You seem better today.”

“I slept well,” I lied smoothly. “The party yesterday... forget about it. Seeing Riley so happy is enough.”

“I’m glad.” His smile was soft, relieved.

“Don’t worry about me.” I traced patterns on his chest, trying to memorize the feel of his skin. “I’m stronger than I look.” –

“I know you are.” He caught my hand, bringing it to his lips. “You’re the strongest person I know.”

We lay there for a few more precious minutes, talking quietly about nothing important. His schedule for the day. Plans for the weekend. Normal couple things that made my heart fracture a little more with each word.

When his alarm went off, I forced myself to get up and start our usual routine. Coffee while he showered. Breakfast while he dressed for work. The domestic dance we’d perfected over the past year.

“I might be a little bit late tonight,” he said, adjusting his tie in the hallway mirror.

“No problem.” I smoothed the tie for him, my fingers lingering against the silk. “I’ll keep dinner warm.”

He caught my hands, studying my face with those perceptive eyes. For a moment, I thought he might see through my careful mask.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” he asked.

“I’m fine.” I went up on my toes, pressing my lips to his. “Really. Go save the world. I’ll hold down the fort here.”

The kiss lasted longer than our usual goodbye pecks. I poured everything I couldn't say into it—all my love, all my gratitude, all my regret. When we finally broke apart, his eyes were dark with something that looked like hunger.

“Hold that thought,” he said, his voice dropping to that rough whisper that always made my knees weak.

“Until tonight.”

“I will.” Another lie.

I stood in the doorway and watched him drive away, waving like I always did. Playing the part of the devoted wife seeing her husband off to work.

“This is for him,” I reminded myself as his car disappeared around the corner. “This is what’s best for everyone.”

Adrian was already up by the time I went back inside, sitting at the kitchen table in his school uniform with a bowl of cereal. His dark hair stuck up in three different directions, and he had milk on his chin.

“Morning, sweetheart,” I said, pressing a kiss to the top of his head. “Ready for school?”

“I guess.” He made a face at his cereal. “Do I have to eat all of this? It’s all soggy now.”

“Just finish what you can.” I sat beside him, smoothing down his stubborn cowlicks. “What do you have planned for today?”

“Math test.” His nose wrinkled. “I studied, but fractions are stupid.”

“Fractions aren’t stupid,” I laughed, my heart clenching at his expression. “They’re just tricky. But you’re smart. You’ll figure them out.”

“Will you help me with homework tonight?”

The question hit me like a physical blow. By tonight, he wouldn’t understand why I wasn’t there to help him anymore. Wouldn’t understand why Mommy had to go away.

“Daddy will help you,” I managed. “He’s much better at math than I am anyway!”

He giggled at that, the sound so pure and innocent it nearly broke me.

The drive to school was torture. Adrian chattered about his friends and his teacher.

“Be good at school today,” I whispered against his hair. “Listen to your teacher. Be kind to your friends.”

“I will.” He pulled back and grinned at me. “Will you pick me up today?”

“Daddy will pick you up,” I said. “He might be a little late, so don’t worry if you have to wait a few extra minutes, okay?”

“Okay.” Adrian shouldered his backpack and opened the car door. “Love you, Mama!”

“Love you too, sweetheart. So much.”

I watched him run across the playground to join his friends, his backpack bouncing with each step. He turned and waved at me once before disappearing through the school doors.

“That’s the last time,” I realized. “The last time I’ll see him wave goodbye.”

The drive home was a blur of tears I couldn’t hold back anymore. By the time I pulled into our driveway, I was sobbing so hard I could barely see.

“Get it together,” I ordered myself. “You still have to face Lily.”

The house felt too quiet when I walked in. The nanny looked up from where she was feeding Lily her morning bottle.

“Good morning, Mrs. Nightshadow,” she said with a warm smile. “How did the drop-off go?”

“Fine,” I managed, hoping she couldn’t hear the tears in my voice.

She chuckled, and bounced Lily gently, “has been perfect as always. Ate her entire bottle without any fuss.”

I approached slowly, drinking in the sight of my daughter. Dark hair like mine. Eyes that shifted between green and blue depending on the light.

“Can I?” I asked, reaching out tentatively.

“Of course! She’s your baby.” Nanny transferred Lily to my arms with practiced ease. “I’ll go start on the laundry while you two have some mommy-daughter time.”

Once we were alone, I carried Lily to the rocking chair by the window. The same chair where I’d spent countless hours nursing her, reading to her, singing lullabies when she couldn’t sleep.

“Hello, my beautiful girl,” I whispered, settling her against my chest. “Mama needs to talk to you about something important.”

“You’re going to be amazing,” I told her, my voice breaking. “You’re going to grow up strong and brave and fierce. Just like your daddy.” READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT FundNovel.net

Lily made soft baby sounds, her fingers finding a strand of my hair to play with.

“I wish I could stay,” I continued, tears falling freely now. “I wish I was strong enough to be the mother deserve. But I’m not.”

I rocked her slowly, memorizing the weight of her in my arms. The way she smelled like baby lotion and something uniquely hers. The soft sounds she made when she was content.

“I love you,” I breathed against her forehead.

Lily’s eyes were starting to droop with sleepiness. I stood carefully, carrying her to the crib and settling her down with infinite gentleness.

“Sweet dreams, little one,” I whispered, pressing one last kiss to her forehead.

I stood there for a long moment, watching her sleep. Committing every detail to memory. Then I turned and walked out of the nursery, closing the door softly behind me.

Nanny was in the living room, folding a basket of tiny clothes.

“I need to run some errands,” I told her, keeping my voice steady. “I might be gone most of the day.”

“I will take care of her. Take all the time you need, Mrs. Nightshadow. We’ll be just fine.”

I went upstairs and packed a small bag with essentials. Nothing that would be missed immediately, nothing that would raise questions. Then I wrote a letter-simple, clean, final. I left it on Damien’s pillow where he’d find it tonight.

At the front door, I paused one last time.

“Goodbye” I whispered, too softly for anyone to hear.

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

Something was off.

I’d been carrying this nagging feeling in my chest all morning, like a splinter I couldn’t dig out. It had started the moment I woke up and found Sera already dressed, moving through our morning routine with that too-bright smile she’d been wearing since yesterday.

I tried to focus on the quarterly reports spread across my desk, but the numbers kept blurring together. My mind kept drifting back to the way Sera had kissed me goodbye this morning.

That should have been a good thing. Instead, it made me feel like I was standing on the edge of a cliff.

“Mr. Nightshadow?”

Emma’s crisp voice cut through my wandering thoughts. She stood beside my desk in another one of her perfectly tailored suits, holding a stack of contracts that needed my attention.

She set them down with practiced efficiency. “They need your signature before the two o’clock deadline.”

I picked up my pen and started signing without really reading them. My mind was elsewhere.

“Also, I’ve rescheduled your meeting with the Seattle division,” Emma continued.

“Fine,” I muttered, scrawling my signature across another page.

She nodded quickly, gathering up the signed papers. “Is there anything else you need right now?”

“No,” I said. “That’s all for now.”

Emma hesitated at the door. “Mr. Nightshadow? If I may... you seem distracted today. Is everything alright?”

The concern in her voice sounded genuine, but it irritated me anyway.

“Everything’s fine,” I said curtly. “Just tired.”

She nodded and left, closing the door behind her with a soft click. I leaned back in my chair and rubbed my temples, trying to ease the tension that had been building there all morning.

“Get it together,” I told myself. “Sera’s fine. She’s home with Lily, probably napping or reading or doing whatever it is she does during the day.”

But the feeling wouldn’t go away. If anything, it was getting stronger. I glanced at my watch. Nearly noon.

I could call Sera. Just to check in. Just to hear her voice and reassure myself that everything was normal.

Before I could talk myself out of it, I was dialing her number.

It rang three times before she answered.

“Hello?” Her voice was soft, slightly breathless.

“Hey, baby,” I said, relief flooding through me at the sound of her. “How’s your day going?”

“It’s going well,” she replied, and I could hear rustling in the background, soft baby sounds. “I’m just feeding Lily right now. She’s being an angel today.”

“That’s my girl.” I closed my eyes, picturing Sera in the nursery rocking chair, Lily cradled against her chest. The image made warmth spread through my chest, chasing away some of the anxiety.

She laughed, but it sounded forced. “Fair enough. What about you? How’s your day?”

“Long. Boring. The usual corporate nonsense.” I spun my chair to face the window, looking out at the city skyline. “I keep getting distracted.”

“By what?”

“By you. Always miss you.

“I know the feeling.” Her voice got softer. “Damien?”

“Yeah?”

“I love you. You know that, right?”

“I love you too, baby. More than anything.”

“I know you do.” There was rustling again, Lily making contented baby noises. “I should probably let you get back to work.”

“Probably. I’ll try not to be too late tonight.”

“Don’t worry about it. Take your time. Adrian and I will be here when you get home.”

“Okay. Kiss Lily for me.”

“I will.”

The line went dead, and I sat there staring at my phone. The conversation had been perfectly normal. Sera had sounded calm, even affectionate. So why did I feel worse than before I’d called?

“Because you’re losing your mind,” I told myself firmly. “Everything is fine. Sera is fine. Stop borrowing trouble.”

I tried to focus on work after that, but it was hopeless. The afternoon crawled by at a snail’s pace. Emma came and went with updates and requests, her presence a constant low-level irritation.

Every time she walked into my office with that professional smile and perfect posture, I wanted to snap at her to go away.

She was efficient, I had to give her that. Probably more efficient than most assistants I'd had. But she wasn't Sera.

By four o'clock, I'd had enough. The quarterly reports could wait until tomorrow. All I wanted was to go home to my family.

"I'm leaving," I announced, standing up and grabbing my jacket.

Emma looked up from her computer in surprise. "But there is a meeting until five—"

"Reschedule it."

"Sir, they specifically requested this time slot. They're flying back to Portland tomorrow morning—"

"Then they can extend their trip by one day." I was already moving toward the door, my need to get home suddenly overwhelming. "Handle it, Emma. That's what you're here for."

"Of course, but—"

I was in the elevator before she could finish protesting, my phone already in my hand to call Sera and let her know I'd be home early. Maybe we could have dinner as a family tonight. Maybe I could help Adrian with his homework and spend some time with Lily before bed.

Maybe whatever was wrong with me would disappear once I was home where I belonged.

The phone rang once. Twice. Three times.

Then it went to voicemail.

"Hi, you've reached Sera. I can't come to the phone right now, but leave a message and I'll call you back as soon as I can!"

I frowned, ending the call without leaving a message. Maybe she was in the bathroom, or putting Lily down for a nap, or just had her hands too full to answer.

I tried again as I walked through the parking garage to my car.

Straight to voicemail again.

By the time I was on the highway, headed toward home, I'd tried calling three more times. Each failed attempt made the uneasy feeling in my chest grow stronger, more insistent. The rightful source is Find★Novel.net

“Her battery probably died,” I told myself as I merged into traffic. “Or she turned the ringer off while Lily was sleeping.”

But deep in my gut, in that primal place where instinct lived, I knew something was wrong.

Very, very wrong.

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

The traffic on Highway 101 moved like molasses, each red light stretching my patience thinner. My hands gripped the steering wheel so tight my knuckles had gone white, and Alex was pacing restlessly beneath my skin like a caged animal.

Something was wrong. I knew it in my bones.

I'd tried calling Sera six more times since leaving the office. Every call went straight to voicemail, her bright, cheerful voice mocking me with its normalcy.

“Hi, you've reached Sera. I can't come to the phone right now...”

The recording played in my head on repeat, each repetition making the knot in my stomach twist tighter.

My phone rang just as I was merging onto the exit for Adrian's school. Unknown number.

“Nightshadow,” I barked into the speaker.

“Mr. Nightshadow? This is Adrian's teacher.”

My heart slammed against my ribs. “Is Adrian okay?”

“Oh yes, he's fine! He's sitting right here with me in the office. But...” She paused, and I could hear the

confusion in her voice. “We're a bit confused about pickup today.”

“What do you mean?” Fresh chapters posted on findnovel.net

“Well, it's nearly five o'clock, and Adrian is still waiting. When I asked him about it, he said his mommy told him this morning that daddy would be picking him up today instead of her.”

The blood drained from my face. “She said what?”

“That you would be picking him up. But we don’t have any change notification from Mrs. Nightshadow, and she’s never missed a pickup before without calling...”

I was already yanking the wheel toward the school, cutting across two lanes of traffic. Car horns blared behind me.

“I’m two minutes away,” I said through gritted teeth. “Keep him there.”

“Of course. He’s perfectly safe, Mr. Nightshadow.”

I ended the call and floored the accelerator.

Sera would never forget to pick up Adrian. Never. Which meant she’d planned this. Told Adrian I’d be coming because she knew she wouldn’t be there.

“Where the fuck is she?”

I screeched into the school parking lot and was out of the SUV before the engine finished cooling. The teacher met me at the front door, her matronly face creased with concern.

“Mr. Nightshadow, I’m so sorry for the confusion.”

“Where is he?”

“Right in here.”

She led me to the main office where Adrian sat in a chair that was too big for him, swinging his legs and clutching his backpack. When he saw me, his face lit up with relief.

“Daddy!” He jumped down and ran into my arms. “I knew you’d come! Mama said you would!”

I lifted him up, holding him tight against my chest while my mind raced. “When did Mama tell you that, buddy?”

“This morning.” Adrian pulled back to look at me, his silver-blue eyes—so much like mine—filled with innocent confusion. “She said you might be a little late but not to worry. But all the other kids got picked up and I thought maybe you forgot about me.”

“I would never forget about you.” My voice came out rougher than I intended. “Never, Adrian. Do you understand?”

He nodded solemnly. “Are we gonna go home now? I wanna see Mama and Lily.”

“Yeah, buddy. Let’s go home.”

I pulled into our driveway with enough force to spray gravel, Adrian yelping in surprise.

“Daddy, you’re driving scary today.”

“Sorry, buddy.” I forced my voice to stay calm as I helped him out of the car. “I’m just eager to see Mama and Lily.”

The house looked normal from the outside. Same pristine landscaping, same elegant stone facade, same warmth radiating from the lit windows. Nothing to indicate that my world was about to collapse.

I opened the front door and immediately called out, “Sera? Baby, I’m home!”

Silence.

No response from upstairs. No sound of Lily crying or cooing. No familiar footsteps hurrying to greet us.

“Mama?” Adrian called out, dropping his backpack by the door. “We’re home!”

Still nothing.

I called for the nanny, my voice echoing off the high ceilings.

She appeared from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a dish towel. Her expression was pleasant but slightly puzzled.

“Oh, Mr. Nightshadow! You’re home early today. And Adrian, sweetheart, how was school?”

“Where’s Sera?” I asked, cutting through the pleasantries.

“She went out this afternoon,” She replied, tilting her head. “Around two o’clock, I think? She said she had errands to run and might be gone most of the day.”

My stomach dropped into my boots. “Did she say where she was going?”

“No, I’m afraid not. She seemed in good spirits though. Spent the morning with Lily, very sweet with her. Fed her, rocked her to sleep, even stayed in the nursery for quite a while after she went down.”

I was already moving toward the stairs, taking them two at a time. Adrian’s footsteps pattered behind me.

Our bedroom looked normal. Sera’s vanity organized exactly how she liked it. No sign of struggle, no indication of packing.

But something felt wrong. Empty.

The nursery was exactly as it should be. Soft afternoon light filtering through the gauze curtains, mobile turning slowly above the crib, tiny baby sounds coming from the sleeping form under the pink blanket.

Lily was fine. Perfect, even. Sleeping peacefully on her back, her tiny fists curled beside her head, dark lashes casting shadows on her chubby cheeks.

But there, tucked beside her in the crib where I couldn't have missed it, was a folded piece of paper.

My blood turned to ice water.

With shaking hands, I reached down and picked up the note, recognizing Sera's handwriting immediately. My name was written on the front in her careful script.

"Damien."

The paper felt impossibly heavy in my hands.

My hands were shaking so badly I could barely hold the paper steady.