

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

Chapter 141 -150

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

My fingers trembled as I unfolded the paper, the sound deafening in the quiet nursery. Adrian stood beside me, but his voice seemed to come from underwater.

The handwriting was definitely Sera's-that careful script I'd fallen in love with when she used to leave me little notes in my office.

"My dearest Damien,"

"By the time you read this, I'll be gone. Please don't look for me. Please don't try to bring me back. This is the hardest thing I've ever had to do, but it's the right thing. The only thing."

My heart stopped beating. Actually stopped. The paper shook so violently in my hands I could barely make out the words.

"I love you. God, Damien, I love you more than I ever thought it was possible to love another person. You saved me, in every way a person can be saved. You gave me Adrian, you gave me Lily, you gave me a life I never dreamed I could have."

"But I can't be what you need anymore."

"No," I whispered, the word torn from my chest. "No, no, no."

"Daddy?" Adrian tugged on my sleeve. "What's wrong? Is that from Mama?"

I couldn't answer him. Couldn't speak. My eyes burned as I forced myself to keep reading.

"The truth is, I'm not a wolf anymore. I'm not your Luna. I'm just a broken human woman who can't protect her children, can't lead beside you, can't even attend a pack function without humiliating herself."

"Last night at the party, I heard them, Damien. I heard what they really think of me. Of us. Of our children."

My hands clenched around the paper, crumpling the edges. Discover more novels at find**novel.net

“They called Adrian and Lily “filthy half-breeds.” They said our bloodline was “tainted forever.” They looked at me like I was contaminating you just by standing next to you.”

“And the worst part is, they’re not wrong.”

“They are fucking wrong,” I snarled, my voice echoing off the nursery walls.

Adrian jumped, his eyes going wide. “Daddy? You said a bad word.”

“I can’t give you what you need. I can’t give our children what they need. I’m human now, Damien. Weak.

Ordinary. Breakable. What happens when someone threatens our pack and I can’t fight? What happens when our children need a mother who can protect them and all I can do is hide behind you?”

Tears blurred my vision, making the words swim together. I blinked them away furiously.

“I won’t be the liability that gets someone killed. I won’t be the weak link that brings down everything you’ve built.”

“And our children... God, our beautiful, perfect children. They deserve better than a mother who will only hold them back. They deserve someone who can teach them about their wolf heritage, someone who can stand proud beside them when they shift for the first time, someone who won’t embarrass them at pack gatherings.”

“Sera,” I breathed, my voice breaking on her name.

“They deserve a real Luna for a mother. Not some broken human pretending to belong.”

“I know you’ll say I’m wrong. I know you’ll try to convince me that I’m enough, that love is all that matters.

But love isn’t enough, is it? Love doesn’t make me strong enough to protect them. Love doesn’t give me back my wolf. Love doesn’t change the fact that I’m a burden now instead of a partner.”

My knees buckled. I grabbed the edge of the crib to keep from falling, the paper crumpling further in my grip.

“I’m grateful we never completed the mating bond. I’m grateful you never marked me. It means you’re free,

Damien. Free to find someone worthy of you. Someone who can stand beside you as an equal. Someone who can give you the support you need to lead our pack.”

“Daddy, you’re scaring me,” Adrian whispered, his small voice cutting through my anguish.

I looked down at him, at his worried silver-blue eyes, and felt something shatter in my chest.

“Find someone who can be a real mother to Adrian and Lily. Someone strong. Someone whole. Someone who won’t spend their entire lives explaining why their mother is different, why she can’t do the things other mothers can do.”

“Please don’t hate me for this. Please understand that I’m doing this because I love you all too much to stay and watch myself drag you down.”

“Take care of our babies. Tell them I love them. Tell them I’m sorry I wasn’t strong enough to stay.”

“And please, please don’t look for me. Let me go, Damien. Let me disappear so you can build the life you really deserve. The life our children deserve.”

“All my love, always,”

“Sera”

“P.S. – I left some things for the children in the closet. Pictures, letters for when they’re older. So they’ll know I loved them even if I couldn’t stay.”

The letter fell from my numb fingers, fluttering to the floor like a dying bird.

The nursery spun around me. The walls, the ceiling, everything tilted and blurred as the full weight of her words crashed over me like a tsunami.

She was gone.

My mate, the mother of my children, the other half of my soul-gone.

“Daddy?” Adrian’s voice seemed to come from very far away. “Where’s Mama? When is she coming home?”

How could I answer that? How could I tell my five-year-old son that his mother had abandoned us? That she thought so little of herself, of us, that she’d rather disappear than fight?

“I don’t know, buddy,” I whispered, my voice completely broken. “I don’t know.”

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I stood at the bus stop three blocks from our house. My hands were shaking. My whole body was shaking.

What the hell did I just do?

The bus wasn't coming for another fifteen minutes. I kept looking back down the street, toward our neighborhood. Toward the house where Lily was sleeping in her crib, not knowing her mother just walked out on her.

My throat burned. I wanted to cry, but the tears wouldn't come. It was like my body had shut down completely.

"Move, I told myself. "You wrote the letter. You made the choice. Now move."

But where was I supposed to go?

I hadn't thought about that part. I'd been so focused on leaving, on doing the right thing, that I never planned what came next. Now I was standing here like an idiot at a bus stop, with nowhere to go and no idea what to do.

The small bag in my hand felt impossibly heavy. Just a few clothes, some cash I'd saved up, my phone. Everything I owned now fit in one little overnight bag.

I couldn't go to Ophelia's. That would be the first place Damien looked. And Ophelia would take one look at me and demand answers.

She'd probably call Damien herself once she found out what I'd done.

I couldn't go north. The rogue wolves were still out there. Without Ayla, I'd be dead within hours.

So where? Where does a human woman with no plan and no future go?

My phone buzzed. My heart jumped so hard it hurt.

"Damien."

But when I looked at the screen, it was just spam. Some stupid robocall about car insurance.

I'd blocked Damien's number before I left. It was the only way to be sure I wouldn't answer when he called. Because I would answer. I was weak like that.

The thought of him finding my letter made my stomach twist into knots. He was probably reading it right now. Probably calling me every name in the book. Probably realizing I was right about everything.

Or maybe he was relieved. Maybe this was easier for him. Now he didn't have to pretend I was enough anymore.

The bus finally arrived with a loud hiss of brakes. The doors opened and I climbed on, dropping my fare into the slot. The driver barely looked at me. Just another passenger going somewhere.

I found a seat near the back and pressed my face against the window. The bus pulled away from the stop, carrying me further from everything I'd ever loved.

We drove past the coffee shop where Damien and I had our first date. Past the park where Adrian learned to ride his bike. Past the clinic where I gave birth to Lily.

Everything looked so normal. So peaceful.

I wanted to scream.

Each mile took me further from my children. My chest felt like someone was squeezing it in a vise.

"This is for them," I kept telling myself. "This is the right thing."

But it didn't feel right. It felt like dying.

I had to get off at the next stop because I couldn't breathe anymore. The bus pulled away, leaving me standing alone on a street corner in a town I didn't recognize.

I found a small diner and ordered coffee. The waitress was human. She smiled at me and asked if I wanted cream. Normal human interaction.

"That's me now," I thought.

The coffee tasted like dirt, but it was hot. It gave me something to focus on besides the hole in my chest where my heart used to be.

A businessman at the next table was talking loudly on his phone about quarterly reports and market projections.

How was I supposed to do this? How was I supposed to live in a world I'd never really belonged to?

I watched the people around me. A mother with two young kids, trying to keep them from spilling their juice boxes. An elderly couple sharing a piece of pie. A teenage girl texting furiously while her food got cold.

Normal. All of them so beautifully, perfectly normal.

I used to think normal was boring. When I was with Damien, when I was part of the pack, normal seemed like settling for less. Now it looked like peace.

My phone buzzed again. Updates are released by FindNOvel.net

This time, I almost dropped it.

The name on the screen made my heart stop.

Caleb.

My hands were shaking as I opened the message.

“Sera! Long time no see, how are you lately?!”

I stared at the words until they blurred together,

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I stared at Caleb’s message until my eyes burned.

“Sera! Long time no see, how are you lately?!”

Those cheerful exclamation points made my chest ache. The coffee shop around me suddenly felt too small, too loud. The teenager across the room was still glued to her phone. Everything was so normal, so ordinary.

My phone buzzed with another message from Caleb.

“Hope you’re doing great! Miss our old conversations.”

Miss our old conversations. Caleb lived at the border now. Far from Damien and the pack and everything that reminded me of what I’d lost.

Maybe... maybe I could go to him.

The thought hit me like a lightning bolt. Caleb wouldn’t ask too many questions. He’d never been the type to pry or judge. If I said I needed help, he’d help. That’s just who he was. This text is hosted at find◆novel.net

My hands shook as I typed a response.

“Long time no see! I’ve run into some trouble and was wondering if I could come see you? Would that be okay?”

I stared at the message for a full minute before hitting send. What if he said no? What if he was too busy? What if seeing me would just bring back bad memories for him too?

My phone buzzed almost immediately.

“Of course! Always okay for you. Are you alright? Do you need me to come get you?”

The immediate concern in his words made tears spring to my eyes. When was the last time someone had offered to drop everything and come get me? When was the last time someone had worried about me without expecting something in return?

“I’m okay. Just need somewhere to stay for a while. I can get there myself.”

“Whatever you need, Sera. You know where I am. Same place as always, Mom and Dad are going to lose their minds when they see you.”

“Thank you, Caleb. Really, I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

“Don’t thank me yet. Fair warning – I’m still a terrible cook.”

Despite everything, I almost smiled. That was so like him. Making jokes when he could probably tell something was seriously wrong.

I paid for my almost untouched coffee and left, heading for the bus station with my pathetic little bag. Each step felt heavier than the last. Each step took me further from my children.

Don’t think about them. Don’t think about Adrian coming home from school or Lily waking up from her nap. Don’t think about Damien finding that letter.

Just keep moving.

The next few hours were torture. Bus after bus, each one older and more crowded than the last. I sat in the back, staring out windows at landscapes that slowly became more familiar. Rolling hills instead of city skylines. Open fields instead of shopping centers.

It looked like freedom. It felt like running away.

Every few minutes, my mind would drift back to home. To Damien probably reading my letter right now. To the look on his face when he realized I was really gone. To Adrian asking where Mommy went.

I pressed my face against the window and tried not to cry. Again.

By the time I reached the final stop, the sun was setting. The “bus station” was basically just a bench and a rusty sign. The kind of place where nothing ever happened and time moved slowly.

I called Caleb.

“Sera?” He picked up on the first ring. “Where are you?”

“At what I think is supposed to be a bus station. Though it’s really just a bench in the middle of nowhere.”

“I know the place. Don’t move. I’ll be right there.”

“Caleb, I-”

“Ten minutes. Don’t go anywhere.”

He hung up before I could say anything else. I sat on the bench and wrapped my arms around myself, watching the sky turn orange and pink above the empty fields.

Headlights appeared down the road, and an old pickup truck pulled up in front of me. The engine made that deep rumbling sound that somehow felt like home.

The driver’s door opened, and Caleb stepped out.

He was still tall and broad and looked like he could handle anything life threw at him. His blonde hair was lighter now. His eyes were exactly as kind as they’d always been, but there were lines around them now. Laugh lines, mostly.

He looked... solid. Real. Like the kind of person who didn’t disappear when things got hard.

“Sera,” he said, and his voice was warm and relieved and everything I needed to hear.

I stood up on shaking legs.

“God, look at you.” He crossed over to me in three long steps and pulled me into the kind of hug that lifted me completely off the ground.

For the first time in days, I felt safe. His arms were strong and warm and he smelled like soap and sunshine and everything good about being young.

He grinned, and it was like watching the sun come out from behind clouds. “Come on, let’s get you home. Mom’s been cooking since I called, and Dad’s been wearing a hole in the floor from pacing.”

He grabbed my bag before I could protest and opened the truck door for me. The interior was clean and comfortable, with a faded air freshener hanging from the rearview mirror.

“Sorry she’s not much to look at,” he said as we pulled away from the tiny depot. “But she gets the job done.”

“She’s perfect.”

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I hadn’t slept.

Couldn’t sleep. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw that fucking letter. Her handwriting. Her words tearing through me like silver bullets.

“Please don’t look for me.”

“Let me go.”

I sat on the edge of our bed as dawn crept through the windows, holding the letter in my hands for the hundredth time. The paper was starting to wear soft from my grip.

She was wrong about everything. Every goddamn thing.

But she was gone.

My chest felt hollow, like someone had reached in and scooped out everything vital. Alex was silent inside my mind, which somehow made it worse. Even my wolf had gone quiet with grief.

A soft cry from the nursery made me fold the letter and shove it back into my jacket pocket. Lily was awake.

I found her in her crib, tiny fists waving in the air, making those soft baby sounds that usually melted my heart. Today they just reminded me that Sera wasn’t here to feed her.

“Hey, beautiful girl,” I whispered, lifting her against my chest. She settled immediately, her little hand curling around my finger.

“She deserves a real mother.”

Sera’s words echoed in my head, and I had to grip the edge of the crib to keep from putting my fist through the wall.

“Your mama is wrong about a lot of things,” I told Lily softly. “But she loves you. Don’t ever doubt that.”

Lily made a contented sound, her eyes drifting shut again. I stood there holding her, breathing in that sweet baby smell, trying to figure out how the hell I was supposed to explain this to Adrian.

The sound of small feet in the hallway made me look up. Adrian appeared in the doorway, his dark hair sticking up at impossible angles, still in his pajamas.

“Morning, Daddy,” he said, rubbing his eyes. “Where’s Mama? She usually gets me breakfast.”

My throat closed up. “Mama had to go away for a while, buddy”

“Go away where?”

“She had some things to take care of,” I said carefully. “Grown-up things. But she’ll... she’ll be back.”

The lie tasted like acid.

Adrian’s face scrunched up with confusion. “But she didn’t say goodbye. Mama always says goodbye when she goes somewhere.”

My heart cracked a little more. “Sometimes grown-ups have to leave quickly. That doesn’t mean she doesn’t love you.”

“Oh.” Adrian seemed to accept this with the resilience only children possessed. “Can you make pancakes? Mama makes the best pancakes, but you’re okay at them too.”

“Yeah, buddy. I can make pancakes.”

“Just keep moving. Keep pretending everything’s normal.”

An hour later, I was in my office, staring at reports I couldn’t focus on. The numbers blurred together on the pages. My hands shook every time I reached for my coffee.

I picked up my phone three times to call Lucas before putting it down again. If word got out that the Alpha’s mate had abandoned him....

No. This had to stay quiet.

I scrolled through my contacts until I found the number I was looking for. Marcus picked up on the second ring.

“Alpha?”

“I need to see you in my office. Now. And bring Tyler and Jake with you.”

“On our way.”

Twenty minutes later, three of my most trusted warriors stood in front of my desk. All of them had served in special operations before joining the pack. All of them knew how to keep their mouths shut.

“I need you to find someone,” I said without preamble. “Quietly. No questions asked. No one else can know about this mission.”

Marcus nodded. “Who are we looking for?”

“Seraphina. My mate.” Updates are released by FindNovel.net

The silence in the room was deafening. I could see the questions in their eyes, but none of them dared ask.

“She left yesterday afternoon,” I continued, my voice steady despite the chaos inside my head. “I don’t know where she went. I don’t know what she’s planning. I just need her found.”

“Any leads, Alpha?” Tyler asked carefully.

“She took a bus. She wouldn’t go north into rogue territory.” I paused, my jaw clenching. “And she doesn’t want to be found. So she’ll try to stay off the radar.”

Jake stepped forward. “What are our orders once we locate her?”

“You don’t approach. You don’t make contact. You just find her and report back to me.” My voice dropped to that dangerous tone that made lesser wolves show their necks. “And if any of this gets back to the pack, I’ll personally tear out your throats. Are we clear?”

“Crystal clear, Alpha,” Marcus said immediately.

“Good.”

They filed out, leaving me alone with my grief and rage.

“Fuck what you want,” I growled to the empty office. “You’re my mate. The mother of my children. I’ll find you, and I’ll drag you home, and I’ll spend the rest of my life proving you wrong about every goddamn thing you wrote in that letter.”

A knock on my door interrupted my spiral into fury. Emma entered with a steaming cup of coffee and that professional smile that was starting to grate on my nerves.

“Your ten o’clock meeting has been moved to eleven,” she said, setting the coffee on my desk.

“Fine.”

She lingered, her sharp eyes taking in my appearance. I probably looked like hell. Hadn't shaved, barely slept, clothes wrinkled from yesterday.

"You look exhausted," she said, her voice taking on a softer tone. "Are you feeling alright?"

"I'm fine."

"If you don't mind me saying, you don't look fine." She perched on the edge of the chair across from my desk, leaning forward with what looked like genuine concern. "I have some herbal remedies my grandmother used to swear by. Natural sleep aids. They might help.

"I don't need herbal remedies."

"Of course not. I just..." She paused, her expression shifting to something that looked uncomfortably like pity. "Is this about your human partner? I feel terrible about what happened at the engagement party. I hope she's recovering from that embarrassing incident."

The coffee cup cracked in my grip.

"Emma," I said, my voice deadly quiet. "Get. Out."

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"Nothing."

Marcus stood in front of my desk like he was delivering a death sentence. The afternoon light streaming through the office windows made everything look too bright, too normal for the hell I was living through.

"What do you mean, nothing?"

"Sera was smart about it, Alpha." Marcus's jaw was tight with frustration. "Hat, face mask, stuck to back streets. We found footage of her at three different bus stops, but after that..." He shook his head. "It's like she just vanished."

My hands clenched into fists on the desk. "She can't just disappear."

Jake said quietly. "No scent trail to follow. No pack connections to trace. She knows how to stay—invisible."

"And she's avoiding main roads," Tyler added. "Sticking to local routes, probably paying cash for everything. She doesn't want to be found."

“I don’t give a shit what she wants,” I snarled, standing up so fast my chair went flying backward. “Find her.”

The three warriors exchanged glances. Marcus stepped forward, his voice careful.

“Alpha, with respect, she’s had almost two days. She could be anywhere by now. Different state, different-”

“I said find her.” My voice dropped to that deadly whisper that made grown wolves show their necks. “I don’t care if you have to check every bus station, every motel, every fucking diner between here and the Pacific Ocean. Find. My. Mate.”

“Yes, Alpha.”

They filed out, leaving me alone with my rage and grief. I slumped back against the desk, running my hands through my hair.

“Two days.”

Two days since I’d held her. Two days since I’d heard her voice. Two days of Adrian asking where Mommy went and me making up lies that tasted like poison.

My phone buzzed. Text message.

For one insane moment, hope flared in my chest. Maybe-

“Unknown number: “Your warranty is about to expire...””

I threw the phone across the room so hard it shattered against the wall.

The intercom crackled. Emma’s voice, professional as always. “Mr. Nightshadow? Your four o’clock is here.”

“Cancel it.”

“But sir, they flew in from-”

“Cancel everything. I’m leaving.”

I had to go home. Had to be there when Adrian got out of school. Had to pretend everything was normal when my world was falling apart.

The drive home was torture. Every woman I passed on the street made my heart skip. Every dark-haired figure at a bus stop made me do a double-take. The rightful source is findnovel.net

“She could be anywhere.”

By the time I pulled into our driveway, the sun was starting to set. The house looked the same from the outside—grand, imposing, perfect.

Inside, it felt like a mausoleum.

“Daddy!” Adrian’s voice echoed through the hallway as he came running toward me, still in his school uniform. “You’re home early!”

I caught him in my arms, breathing in his little-boy scent. “How was school, buddy?”

“Good! We learned about butterflies. Did you know some of them can fly really, really far?” His eyes were bright with excitement. “Mrs. Peterson said some butterflies travel thousands of miles!”

“Like your mother.”

“That’s pretty amazing,” I managed.

“Is Mama back yet?” Adrian looked past me toward the front door with hopeful eyes. “I made her a picture at school.”

My throat closed up. “Not yet, sweetheart.”

“When is she coming back?”

“Soon,” I lied. “Why don’t you show me that picture?”

Bath time, bedtime stories, tucking him in with promises that everything would be okay. Lies, all of it.

Then it was just me and Lily.

I sat in the nursery rocking chair, holding my daughter while she slept. She was so small, so perfect. Dark hair like her mother’s, eyes that shifted between green and blue depending on the light.

“She left because she thinks you deserve better, I whispered to Lily. “But she’s wrong. There’s no one better than your mama. No one.”

Lily stirred but didn’t wake. I kissed her forehead, breathing in that sweet baby smell.

After I put Lily in her crib, I stood there staring at the empty spot on the rocking chair where Sera used to sit. Where she’d nursed our daughter, sung lullabies, made everything right just by being there, I had to know if she’d said anything to her friends. If she’d given any hint about her plans.

The drive to Ophelia's apartment complex took fifteen minutes. I climbed the stairs to the third floor and knocked on apartment 3B.

Footsteps inside, then the peephole went dark as someone looked through it.

The door swung open, and Ophelia's face appeared. She took one look at me—alone, disheveled, probably looking like hell—and her expression shifted from confusion to alarm.

“Damien? What are you doing here? Where's Sera?”

The hope in her voice was like a knife to the chest.

“That's what I came to ask you.”

Her face went pale. “What do you mean? Ask me what?”

“Is she here? Did she call you? Did she say anything about—”

“Whoa, slow down.” Ophelia stepped back, gesturing for me to come inside. “What's going on? You're scaring me.”

I stepped into her tiny living room, too big for the space, too desperate for polite conversation.

“She's gone, Ophelia.”

“Gone where?”

“I don't know. She left yesterday. Took some clothes, left a letter, and disappeared.”

The color drained completely from Ophelia's face. She stared at me for a long moment, then sank down onto her couch like her legs wouldn't hold her anymore.

“She left? She left you? Left the kids?”

“She thinks...” I couldn't finish the sentence. Couldn't say the words out loud.

Ophelia was quiet for a moment, processing. Then something shifted in her expression. Her shock transformed into fury so pure it made the air in the room feel electric.

“What did you do?”

“What?”

“What. Did. You. Do?” She stood up slowly, and even though she was a foot shorter than me, I had the urge to step back. “Sera wouldn't just leave her children. Not unless something horrible happened.”

“I didn’t do anything-”

“Bullshit!” She was yelling now, closing the distance between us with quick, angry steps and grabbed the front of my shirt with both hands, shaking me with surprising strength. “That woman went through hell and back just to get to you! She survived torture, lost her wolf, gave birth to your daughter while completely human because she loved you!”

I stared down at her, my chest tight with guilt and rage and grief.

“Why isn’t she here?” Ophelia’s voice cracked, tears starting to stream down her face. “Why is my best friend out there somewhere, alone and broken, thinking she’s not good enough for her own family?”

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The Morrison house looked exactly the same as I remembered from before visits—white clapboard siding with forest green shutters, a wraparound porch lined with hanging flower baskets, and that old wooden swing.

“They’re gonna lose their minds,” Caleb said again as we pulled into the gravel driveway. “Mom’s been cooking since I called. Pretty sure she made enough food to feed the entire pack.”

I managed a weak smile.

He turned off the engine and looked at me with those kind blue eyes. “You ready for this?”

“No.” I wasn’t ready for anything.

But I nodded anyway.

The front door burst open before we even made it up the porch steps.

“Seraphina!”

Margaret appeared in the doorway like a force of nature—gray hair in a messy bun, flour-dusted apron, arms already outstretched for a hug. Behind her, Robert emerged with that gentle smile I remembered so well.

“Oh my goodness, look at you!” Margaret pulled me into one of those bone-crushing hugs that only mothers could give. “You’re skin and bones! Haven’t they been feeding you in that fancy city?”

“Mom,” Caleb warned gently. “Let her breathe.”

“Don’t you ‘Mom‘ me, Caleb Morrison.” But she released me, her weathered hands moving to cup my face. “Let me look at you properly.”

I tried to smile, tried to pretend her maternal concern wasn’t making my chest ache with longing for something I’d never really had. “Hi, Mrs. Morrison. It’s good to see you.”

“None of this Mrs. Morrison nonsense. You’re family, sweetheart. Always have been.” Her eyes—so much like Caleb’s—searched my face with motherly worry. “You look tired, honey. When’s the last time you had a decent meal?”

“I ate on the bus—”

“Bus food doesn’t count.” She was already herding me toward the front door. “Robert, get her bags. Caleb, wash up. I’ve got pot roast in the oven and fresh biscuits cooling on the counter”

The interior of the house was exactly as I remembered. Worn hardwood floors covered with colorful braided rugs. Family photos covering every available surface. The smell of home cooking and lemon furniture polish.

“I hope you don’t mind the couch,” Margaret fussed, leading me toward the living room. “We turned Caleb’s old room into Robert’s workshop, and the guest room is full of Christmas decorations I’ve been meaning to sort through.”

“The couch is perfect,” I said quickly. “Really.”

Margaret piled my plate high with pot roast and mashed potatoes and green beans from her garden, chattering about local gossip and asking gentle questions about my life that I deflected as carefully as possible.

“And how are those babies of yours?” she asked, passing me the butter for my third biscuit. “Caleb mentioned you have a new girl.”

My fork froze halfway to my mouth. “They’re... they’re good. Growing fast.”

“Oh, how wonderful!” Margaret’s face lit up. “I bet they’re beautiful. Do they have your eyes?”

“Adrian has his father’s eyes. Lily has mine and Damien’s mixed together—blue—green like the ocean.”

“They’re perfect,” I whispered.

Margaret must have heard something in my voice because she reached over to pat my hand. “Of course they are, honey. Children always are.”

Robert steered the conversation toward safer topics after that—the weather, local news, Caleb’s auto shop. I contributed what I could, but my mind kept drifting.

Were Adrian and Lily eating dinner right now? Was Damien home, or was he still at the office, drowning himself in work to avoid thinking about me?

Had Adrian asked about me today?

“Sera?” Caleb’s voice pulled me back to the present. “You okay?”

“Just tired,” I lied. “It’s been a long day.”

“Of course it has, sweetheart.” Margaret was already standing, clearing dishes with motherly efficiency. “You must be exhausted. Why don’t you get settled while us old folks clean up?”

“I can help-”

“Absolutely not.” She shooed me toward the living room. “You’re a guest in this house. Guests don’t do dishes.”

An hour later, after hugs and “sleep well, honey” and promises of pancakes for breakfast, Margaret and Robert disappeared upstairs, leaving Caleb and me alone in the living room.

He’d set up the couch with pillows and blankets, even found an old stuffed animal from somewhere and placed it carefully by the pillow.

“Thank you,” I said quietly. “For all of this. I know it’s unexpected, me showing up like this.”

“Don’t thank me yet. He settled into his father’s old recliner, studying my face with those perceptive blue eyes. “You haven’t told me why you’re here.”

My stomach clenched. “I told you, I ran into some trouble-”

“Sera.” His voice was gentle but firm. “I’ve known you since we were kids. You don’t run to other people when you have trouble. You handle it yourself. So whatever brought you to my doorstep...” He paused. “It must be pretty bad.”

I stared down at my hands, folded in my lap like a prayer. “I don’t even know where to start.”

“Start wherever feels right.”

The kindness in his voice broke something inside me. Before I could stop myself, the words started pouring out.

“I left them. My mate, my children. I packed a bag and left and I don’t know if I can ever go back.” Tears started streaming down my cheeks. “God, Caleb, what kind of mother abandons her babies?”

“Hey.” He was out of his chair in seconds, kneeling in front of the couch, his hands covering mine. “Hey, slow down. You’re not making sense.”

“I’m not making sense because nothing makes sense!” I pulled my hands free, wiping my face with the backs of them. “My life is falling apart and I don’t know how to fix it.”

“Okay. Okay.” His voice stayed calm, steady. “Tell me what happened. From the beginning.”

So I did.

I told him about the rogues. About being captured, tortured, poisoned. About Ayla’s death and waking up human in a hospital bed.

I told him about the engagement party. About the whispers and stares and Emma thinking I was the nanny. About feeling like a stranger in my own life.

I told him about the letter I’d left. About running away because I couldn’t stand to watch myself drag down the people I loved most.

Through all of it, Caleb listened without interruption. His expression shifted from concern to horror to something that looked like fury, but he never once told me to stop.

When I finally ran out of words, the silence stretched between us like a living thing.

“Sera.” His voice was hoarse. “You’re telling me you’re completely human now? No wolf at all?”

Fresh tears spilled down my cheeks. “She’s gone, Caleb. Ayla’s gone. The rogues... they pumped so much wolfsbane into my system that the neural pathways connecting me to my wolf were severed.” UPDATE FROM [find•novel.net](http://findnovel.net)

Caleb was quiet for a long moment, processing everything I’d told him. “Then don’t do anything right now.” His voice gentled. “Stay here.”

Rest. Heal. Figure out what you actually want instead of what you think everyone else needs.”

I looked up at him through my tears.

“Sera.” He pulled me into his arms, holding me tight against his chest while I cried. “You’re exactly who you’ve always been. Strong, brave, incredibly stubborn, and way too hard on yourself, You’re not alone, Sera. You never have to be alone again.”

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

I woke up to the smell of coffee and bacon.

For one perfect, stupid moment, I forgot where I was. Forgot what I'd done. My hand reached across the couch for Adrian, the way it always did in the mornings when he'd crawl into bed with me.

Empty space.

Reality crashed back in. The Morrison's living room. Three hundred miles from my babies.

From my family.

"Former family," I corrected myself, sitting up and wiping my face. "They're better off without you."

But the thought felt hollow. Wrong. Like trying to convince myself the sky was green instead of blue.

"Good morning, sweetheart!" Margaret's voice floated in from the kitchen, bright and warm. "Coffee's ready! Come eat before it gets cold!"

I pulled on yesterday's clothes and padded into the kitchen, where Margaret was flipping pancakes with the same easy efficiency she probably brought to everything in her life. Robert sat at the table reading a newspaper, reading glasses perched on his nose.

"Morning," I managed, my voice rough from crying.

"Sit, sit!" Margaret gestured to the empty chair with her spatula. "You look like you didn't sleep at all. Here, drink this." She pressed a mug of coffee into my hands before I could protest.

Caleb appeared in the doorway, hair damp from a shower, looking disgustingly well-rested. "Morning. You sleep okay?"

"Fine." I lied.

His eyes said he knew better, but he just grabbed his own coffee and settled across from me.

Margaret loaded my plate with pancakes, bacon, eggs—enough food to feed three people. "Eat up. You need your strength."

I picked at the food, managing a few bites to be polite. Everything tasted like cardboard. Like guilt.

"Sera?" Caleb's voice pulled me back, "Where'd you go just now?"

"Nowhere," I said quickly. "Sorry. Just tired."

Margaret and Robert exchanged one of those parent looks—the kind that said they were having an entire conversation without words.

“Seraphina,” Robert said gently, setting down his paper. “We want you to know that you’re welcome to stay here as long as you need.”

“Oh, I couldn’t-” I started.

“Yes, you could,” Margaret interrupted firmly. “You absolutely could. In fact, we insist.”

I shook my head. “You’ve already done so much. I was thinking... maybe I could find work in the city? There must be human businesses that need-”

“Absolutely not.” Margaret planted her hands on her hips. “You think we’re going to let you wander off alone into some city where you don’t know anyone? Where anything could happen to you?”

“I’m not a child-”

“No, you’re family.” Robert’s quiet voice somehow carried more weight than any shout. “And family doesn’t abandon each other.”

The words hit me like a slap. Family doesn’t abandon each other.

Unlike what I’d just done.

“I don’t want to impose,” I whispered.

“You’re not imposing,” Caleb said. “Actually, I could use the help.”

I looked up at him. “Help with what?”

“The repair shop.” He leaned back in his chair, casual as anything. “Business has been picking up. I could use an extra pair of hands.”

“Caleb, I don’t know anything about cars-”

“You don’t need to. I need someone to handle the front desk, answer phones, manage appointments, deal with customers.” He grinned.

“You know, all that organized, professional stuff you’re actually good at.”

Margaret beamed. “That’s a wonderful idea! And you’d be right here, safe, with people who care about you.”

“I can’t pay you much,” Caleb admitted. “But it’s steady work, and you’d have a place to stay. Free room and board.” READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT [find*.novel.net](http://finda*.novel.net)

“I don’t want charity-”

“It’s not charity if you’re working for it,” Robert pointed out.

I stared down at my untouched pancakes, my mind spinning. Stay here? Work at a small-town repair shop? It was so far from the life I’d built in Silver Moon Harbor. So far from who I used to be.

But then again, I wasn’t that person anymore, was I?

“I don’t know,” I said finally. “I was thinking... maybe it would be better if I just disappeared completely. Went somewhere no one knows me. Started over fresh.

“Running away doesn’t work,” Caleb said quietly. “Trust me. I tried it after high school. Went to the city, thought I could outrun everything I was feeling. Lasted six months before I came crawling back home.”

“It’s different-”

“Is it?” His brown eyes held mine. “You think disappearing into some human city is going to make you forget your kids? Make you stop missing your mate?”

“At least here,” Margaret said softly, “you’d have people who care about you. People who can help you figure out what you really want.”

“And,” Caleb added, “I promise—absolutely swear—that I won’t tell anyone where you are. Not unless you want me to.”

I looked up sharply. “You mean that?”

“Of course I mean it.” He looked almost offended. “If you want to hide from the whole world, that’s your choice. I won’t betray that trust. None of us will.”

Robert nodded. “You have our word, Seraphina. Whatever you need, whatever you decide—we support you.”

My throat went tight. “I’m a mess,” I whispered. “I left my children. I abandoned my mate. What kind of person does that?”

“A person who’s hurting,” Margaret said, moving around the table to pull me into a hug. “A person who needs time to heal.”

I looked around the table at these three people who barely knew me, who had no reason to care, who were offering me everything without asking for anything in return.

“They’re better than you deserve,” my guilty conscience whispered.

“Okay,” I heard myself say. “Okay. I’ll stay. For a little while, at least.”

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

“Ouch! Shit!”

The wrench slipped from my oily fingers and smacked me right in the shin. I hopped around on one foot like an idiot, clutching my leg.

“Language, city girl!” Caleb’s voice drifted out from under the truck hood, but I could hear him laughing.

“Oh, shut up!” I shot back, rubbing my bruised shin. “That actually hurt!”

“What hurt more? Your leg or your pride?”

I stuck my tongue out at the general direction of his voice, even though he couldn’t see me.

“Both, thank you very much.”

Two weeks. Two whole weeks of grease under my fingernails, oil stains on my clothes, and tools that seemed determined to attack me.

My hands looked like I’d been wrestling with machinery—which, to be fair, I had been.

Gone were the perfectly manicured nails and soft skin. Now I had actual calluses. Real, honest-to-God calluses from real work. And weirdly? I was kind of proud of them.

“Sera, you still alive over there?” Caleb poked his head out, blonde hair sticking up every which way, a smudge of black grease across his cheek.

“Unfortunately.” I bent down to pick up the traitorous wrench. “This thing has it out for me, I swear.”

“The wrench isn’t the problem. You’re holding it wrong.”

“I am not!”

“Are too. He emerged fully from under the hood, wiping his hands on an already filthy rag. “Here, let me show you.”

Before I could protest, he was behind me, his arms coming around to guide my grip on the wrench. His chest pressed against my back, warm and solid, and I caught a whiff of his scent motor oil, soap, and something purely masculine.

“See? Like this, he murmured near my ear, his hands covering mine. “Don’t grip so tight. Let the tool do the work.”

My brain short-circuited for exactly three seconds. Then I jerked away from him like I’d been burned.

“Got it. Thanks. I’m good now.”

Caleb stepped back, his eyes twinkling with amusement. “You sure? Because your face is about as red as that fire engine we worked on yesterday.”

“It’s hot in here,” I mumbled, turning back to the engine I’d been working on.

“Uh–huh.”

I could practically hear his grin. Smug bastard.

“Don’t you have your own work to do?” I asked, not looking at him.

“I do. But watching you wrestle with basic tools is way more entertaining.”

I grabbed a shop rag and threw it at his head. He ducked, laughing.

“You’re terrible,” I said, but I was fighting a smile now too.

“Terribly charming, you mean.”

“Terribly full of yourself.”

The phone rang, cutting through our banter. I moved to answer it, grateful for the distraction.

“Morrison’s Auto Repair.”

“Hi honey, it’s Mrs. Patterson. Is my car ready yet?”

Sweet Mrs. Patterson, who brought us homemade cookies every time she came in. “Just finished up! Your oil’s been changed, and Caleb checked all your fluids. Everything looks great.”

“Oh wonderful! I’ll be by this afternoon to pick her up.”

“Perfect. See you then!”

I hung up and turned to find Caleb watching me with an odd expression.

“What?”

“Nothing,” he said quickly. “It’s just... you’re really good at this.”

“Answering phones? It’s not exactly rocket science.”

“No, I mean all of it. The customers love you. You remember everyone’s names, their car problems, even their kids’ birthdays. Yesterday you helped old Mr. Jameson troubleshoot his truck over the phone and saved him a service call.”

I shrugged, suddenly self-conscious. “I just listen.”

“It’s more than that.” Caleb’s voice got softer. “You care. About the people, about doing good work. You belong here, Sera.”

“I... I started, then stopped. What was I supposed to say to that?”

The moment stretched between us, warm and comfortable and terrifying all at once. Then the shop bell chimed, announcing a customer.

“I’ll get it,” I said quickly, escaping to the front office.

Around lunchtime, I was reconciling the morning’s receipts when a wave of homesickness hit me so hard it took my breath away.

“What are Adrian and Lily doing right now?”

I glanced at the clock. Almost noon. Adrian would be at school, probably eating lunch with his friends, chattering about whatever five-year-olds chatted about. And Lily... God, Lily would be napping in her crib, or maybe playing with those colorful blocks Damien bought her.

My chest tightened. The numbers on the receipt blurred as tears threatened.

“Stop it,” I told myself firmly. “You made this choice. They’re better off without you.”

But were they? Or was I just a coward who ran away instead of fighting for her family?

“Hey.” Caleb’s voice made me look up. He was standing in the doorway between the garage and office, concern written all over his face.

“You okay?”

“I’m fine.” My voice came out too bright, too fake.

Caleb studied me for a moment, then moved closer. “You were thinking about them, weren’t you? Your kids.”

I nodded, not trusting my voice.

“That’s normal,” he said gently. “Hell, it would be weird if you didn’t miss them.”

“It hurts,” I whispered. “Every day. Like there’s this hole in my chest that just keeps getting bigger.”

“I know.”

“I think you’re hurting,” he said carefully. “I think you made an impossible choice because you couldn’t see any other options. But Sera...

hiding here isn’t going to fix what’s broken.”

“Maybe some things can’t be fixed.”

“Bullshit.”

The word came out so sharp it made me flinch.

“You want to know what I see when I look at you?” Caleb continued, his voice intense. “I see a woman who survived torture that would have killed most people. Who gave birth to two children while dealing with trauma that would have broken anyone else. Who learned to run a business, handle pack politics, manage a household with a baby and a five-year-old.”

‘Caleb...’

“You’re not broken, Sera. You’re healing. But you can’t heal by pretending the people you love don’t exist.” NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS are published on

“I don’t know how to go back,” I whispered.

“Maybe you don’t go back,” he said softly. “Maybe you move forward. But you do it as you, not as some watered-down version you think is safer.”

I laughed, but it came out shaky. “When did you get so wise?”

“Must be all that small-town living” His grin was gentle now, understanding. “So what do you say we start with lunch? I’ll buy.”

“Okay,” I said quietly. “Lunch. But I’m still buying”

“Deal.”

As we walked toward the door, I caught my reflection in the chrome of a bumper, Messy braid, oil-stained shirt, dirt under my fingernails. I looked nothing like the polished executive I used to be.

I looked real.

Brother’s Best Friends Are My Mates

Three weeks.

Three fucking weeks since Sera walked out of our lives, and I was no closer to finding her than the day she left.

I sat behind my desk, staring at Marcus’s latest report without really seeing the words. Another dead end. Another day of hope crushed into dust.

“No trace of her at any of the bus terminals in a 200-mile radius. Checked every hotel, motel, and boarding house we could find. It’s like she just vanished into thin air.”

I crumpled the paper and threw it across the room, where it joined a growing pile of similar reports. Useless. All of it.

“Alpha?” Marcus stood in my doorway, his expression carefully neutral. Behind him, Tyler and Jake waited with that same look of professional sympathy that made me want to put my fist through something.

“Tell me you have good news,” I said, though my voice sounded dead even to my own ears.

“We expanded the search to include smaller towns, off-the-grid places where someone might go to disappear,” Marcus said. “Found a few possibilities, but...”

“But?”

“Without more specific information about where she might go, we’re basically searching blind. She could be anywhere by now.”

“Anywhere.” The word echoed in my empty chest like a death knell.

“Keep looking,” I ordered.

“Alpha-”

“I said keep looking” My voice dropped to that deadly whisper that made grown wolves back down. “Did I stutter?”

“No, Alpha. We’ll keep looking.”

They filed out, leaving me alone with my rage and desperation. I picked up Sera’s letter from my desk, the paper soft from handling, the ink smudged from my tears.

“I’ll find you if I have to tear apart every town between here and the Pacific Ocean.” Check latest chapters at findnovel.net

A knock on the door interrupted my spiral. “Come in.”

Lucas entered with his usual easy smile, carrying two cups of coffee. “Thought you might need this. You look like hell.”

“Thanks for the pep talk.” I accepted the coffee gratefully. At least Lucas still treated me like a normal person instead of a grief-stricken madman.

“So,” he said, settling into the chair across from my desk. “How are Sera and the kids? Feels like I haven’t seen her in forever. So has Riley.”

The question hit me like a physical blow. I managed to keep my expression neutral, but barely.

“She’s been busy with Lily,” I lied smoothly. “You know how it is with a newborn. She’s exhausted most of the time.”

“Right, of course.” Lucas’s face lit up with understanding. “New mom life is rough. Riley keeps talking about babies, and honestly, the idea of no sleep for months terrifies me.”

“She’ll adjust,” I said carefully. “Sera’s stronger than she looks.”

“She’s amazing,” Lucas agreed. “The way she handles everything—work, Adrian, now Lily. I don’t know how she does it.”

“Yeah,” I managed. “Amazing”

Lucas studied my face with those perceptive eyes. “You okay, man? You seem... I don’t know. Off.”

“Just tired. Long hours at the office.”

“Maybe you should take some time off. Spend it at home with your family. I’m sure Sera would appreciate the help.”

“Maybe,” I lied.

Lucas grinned and leaned back in his chair. “God, listen to me giving relationship advice. Six months ago, I couldn’t even tell Riley how I felt about her, and now I’m acting like some kind of expert.”

“How are the wedding plans coming along?” I asked, desperate to change the subject.

“Slow. Riley wants something simple, but her mom has... opinions.” He laughed. “I just show up where they tell me to and try not to screw anything up.”

“Smart strategy.”

“All the good things do.” Lucas stood up, checking his watch. “I should get going. Riley’s meeting me for lunch, and you know how she gets when I’m late.”

“Give her my best.”

“Will do. And tell Sera I said hi. Maybe you guys can come to dinner soon? It’s been too long since we all hung out together.”

“I’ll ask her,” I lied again.

After Lucas left, I slumped forward in my chair, my head in my hands. The weight of the lies was crushing. Every casual question about Sera, every assumption that we were still a happy family, felt like someone driving a stake through my heart.

My phone buzzed. Text from Ophelia.

“Any news?”

“Nothing. Dead end after dead end.”

Her response came immediately. “We need to talk, Can you meet me after work?”

I stared at the message. Ophelia had been helping with the search from the beginning, using her own contacts and connections to try to find any trace of Sera. She was as desperate as I was, maybe more so. She’d lost her best friend.

“Where?”

“The park by Adrian’s school. 6 PM.”

“I’ll be there.”

The afternoon crawled by at a snail’s pace. Every minute felt like an hour, every hour like a lifetime. I tried to focus on work, but the quarterly reports and contract negotiations felt meaningless.

By six o'clock, I was pacing like a caged animal in the parking lot of Riverside Park. Ophelia's car pulled up five minutes later, and she got out looking as tired and frustrated as I felt.

"Any word from Marcus today?" she asked without preamble.

"Nothing. Same as yesterday and the day before." I kicked a stone viciously across the asphalt. "It's like she just evaporated."

"She didn't evaporate, Damien. She's somewhere. We just need to think differently about where she might go."

I looked at her sharply. "What do you mean?"

Ophelia said, her voice gaining strength. "Think about it, Damien. If you were going to disappear, where would you go? You'd go somewhere safe. Somewhere with people you trust."

"But Sera doesn't have-" I stopped mid-sentence as her meaning hit me.

"She doesn't have a lot of close friends," Ophelia continued. "Most of her relationships were here, with the pack. But there is someone..."

"Who?" I breathed.

"Caleb Morrison!" Ophelia's eyes were bright with possibility. "That's the only person I can remember."

My mind raced. Caleb. I can still remember him, too.

"Do you think she would go to him?"

"If she was desperate? If she felt like she had nowhere else to turn?" Ophelia's voice was gentle but certain. "Yeah. I think she might."

For the first time in three weeks, something that felt like hope flickered in my chest. It was small, fragile, but it was there.

"Then we need to find him," I said.

Brother's Best Friends Are My Mates

I was already reaching for my car keys before Ophelia could respond.

“Whoa.” She caught my arm, her grip surprisingly strong. “Slow down, Damien. We need to think this through.”

“Think what through?” I shook her off, my heart racing with the first real hope I’d felt in three weeks. “If Sera’s there, I need to get to her now.”

“And what if she’s not? What if we’re wrong?” Ophelia’s voice was gentle but firm. “You’ve been holding it together by a thread. I won’t watch you fall apart if this is another dead end.”

Her words hit me like cold water. She was right. I’d been surviving on pure willpower and desperation. If this didn’t pan out...

“But what if she is there?” I asked quietly. “What if she’s been there this whole time, and I’ve been searching in all the wrong places?”

Ophelia studied my face for a long moment. “Then we go get her. Together. But we do this smart, okay?”

I nodded, though every instinct screamed at me to get in the car and drive until I found her.

“Do you even know where Caleb lives?”

“I can find out.”

An hour later, I stood in my driveway, keys in hand, watching Ophelia throw an overnight bag into her car. The sun was already setting, painting the sky orange and pink. We’d lost daylight, but I couldn’t wait until morning. Not when I might be hours away from holding Sera again.

The front door opened, and Adrian appeared on the porch in his pajamas, his dark hair sticking up at impossible angles.

“Daddy?” His voice was small, uncertain. “Where are you going?”

My heart clenched. “I have to go somewhere for work, buddy.”

“At nighttime?”

I knelt down to his level, looking into those silver-blue eyes that were so much like mine. “Sometimes grown-up work happens at weird times.”

Adrian studied my face with that unnerving perception children sometimes possessed. “Are you going to look for Mama?”

The question hit me like a punch to the chest, I’d been so careful, so sure I was hiding the truth from him. But kids saw more than adults gave them credit for.

“What makes you think that?”

“She’s been gone a really long time, Adrian said quietly. “And you’re sad. Like. Even when you smile.”

I closed my eyes for a moment, fighting back tears. When I opened them again, Adrian was still watching me with that patient, knowing expression.

“Yeah, buddy,” I said finally. “I’m going to look for Mama.”

“Can I come?”

“No, sweetheart. You need to stay here with Ms. Sarah and take care of Lily.”

“But I want to help find her too.” His bottom lip wobbled slightly. “I miss her so much, Daddy.”

I pulled him into my arms, holding him tight against my chest. “I know you do. I miss her too.”

“Is she lost?”

“She had to go away for a little while,” I said carefully. “But I’m going to find her and bring her home. I promise.”

The drive to the border took four hours. Four hours of tense silence, broken only by Ophelia’s occasional directions from the GPS and the sound of my hands gripping the steering wheel so tight my knuckles went white.

Every mile took us further from civilization and deeper into rural territory. Towns gave way to farmland, then to forests and mountains.

The kind of place where people went when they wanted to disappear.

Turn left at the next intersection,” Ophelia said, squinting at her phone in the dim light.

I turned onto a narrow two-lane road that seemed to wind through endless trees. “How much further?”

“According to this, about ten miles to the town center.” IF YOU WANT TO READ MORE CHAPTERS, PLEASE VISIT [find~novel~net](http://find-novel-net)

The perfect place to hide from a world that had become too painful to face.

“Damien,” Ophelia said softly. “What are you going to say to her? If she’s there?”

I’d been asking myself the same question for the past four hours. What did you say to the woman who’d walked out of your life because she thought she wasn’t good enough?

“I don’t know,” I admitted. “I’ll figure it out when I see her.”

The town appeared around a bend in the road small, quiet, exactly what I’d expected. A few houses scattered along the main street, a general store with a neon “Open” sign flickering in the window, and in the distance, the glow of what looked like a repair shop, Morrison’s Auto Repair. The sign was old but well-maintained, and there were lights on in the building behind it.

I pulled into the gravel parking lot, my heart hammering against my ribs. This was it. Either Sera was here, or I was about to face another crushing disappointment.

“You ready for this?” Ophelia asked.

“No.”

But I got out of the car anyway,

The house behind the repair shop looked lived-in and welcoming. Warm light spilled from the windows, and I could see the flicker of what might be a television in the living room.

I walked up to the front porch, my legs feeling like lead.

I raised my hand to knock, then froze as I heard voices from inside.

A man’s voice. Deep, familiar.

And then... a woman’s laugh.

Soft, musical, heartbreakingly familiar.

My heart stopped completely, then started beating so fast I thought it might burst. She was here. She was actually here.

I pounded on the door with enough force to rattle the frame.

“Sera!” I called out, not caring who heard me. “Sera, I know you’re in there!”

The voices inside went silent. Footsteps approached the door, but they were too heavy to be hers.

The door opened, and Caleb Morrison stood there, looking exactly as I remembered him. Tall, broad-shouldered, with that easy confidence that had always annoyed me. His blonde hair was mussed, like he’d been running his hands through it, and he was wearing jeans and a flannel shirt that made him look like he belonged here.

Unlike me, in my expensive suit and desperation.

“Damien?” I could see the surprise and wariness in his eyes. “What are you doing here?”

“Is she here?” The words exploded out of me with all the desperation I’d been holding back for three weeks. “Is Sera here?”

Something flickered across Caleb’s face.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said evenly.