

My Sister 205

Chapter 205 PUP WHISPERER

SERAPHINA'S POV

“Boys!” Maxwell barked, managing to set them both on the ground. “Apologize—right now.”

The twins crossed their arms in unison, glaring at each other with matching stubborn scowls.

“Now,” he repeated, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“I’m sorry,” the one in the blue flannel said to his brother. “Sorry you’re such a dumbass!”

Maya snorted.

Devin shot her a reproachful look, and she pursed her lips, trying to stifle her smile.

Sarah gave my mother an apologetic smile. “I’m so sorry, Margaret. They’ve been a little...energetic lately.”

“A little?” Maya muttered under her breath.

My mother chuckled good-naturedly. “Please, don’t worry. We’ve seen worse. Like you said, they’re just spirited boys.”

“Spirited,” Maxwell echoed dryly. “That’s one word for it.” He turned back to his sons. “Noah, Zach—come on. Greet everyone.”

The twins scowled in perfect harmony.

Daniel, bless his heart, stepped forward before anyone could react. He squared his small shoulders, the same gentle composure in his eyes that had always made me proud.

“Hi,” he said kindly, extending his hand. “I’m Daniel.”

A few approving murmurs rose from the adults—Sarah smiled, my mother’s eyes softened, and Devin gave a faint nod of approval.

But instead of returning the greeting, the twins exchanged a defiant glance and turned away with an exaggerated huff.

Daniel’s hand faltered midair before he slowly pulled it back. His smile dimmed, but he didn’t say a word. He simply stood there, quiet and dignified in a way that was far beyond his years.

My chest tightened. I reached out for him and wrapped my arm around his shoulders. He looked up at me, and I gave him a small smile and a subtle shake of my head: 'Don't take it personally.'

Maxwell, however, wasn't nearly as composed. His jaw tightened. "I've had just about enough!" he snapped, grabbing each twin gently but firmly by the arm and steering them away from the group.

The boys protested, whining all the way to the far end of the courtyard.

An awkward quiet lingered in their absence.

Maya gave an embarrassed little laugh, her cheeks flushed. "They weren't always like this," she said quickly, turning toward us. "They used to be sweet, actually. Polite, even. But ever since..."

She hesitated, glancing at her brother's retreating figure.

Her father filled the silence quietly. "Since their mother left."

My mother's smile faded into something melancholic. "I'm sorry," she said. "That must've been difficult for them."

Devin nodded, his gaze fixed on Maxwell and the boys in the distance. “A year ago. Willow—Maxwell’s ex-wife—left to pursue her research abroad. She’s an archaeologist. It was quite messy and generally painful.”

Maya sighed. “The boys adore her, and they don’t understand why she had to go. So, they take it out on him.”

“Exactly,” Sarah said softly. “And Max—well, he’s trying. He took leave from his pack duties just to focus on the boys, but...” She trailed off with a helpless shrug. “Progress is slow.”

I glanced again at the scene near the edge of the courtyard. Maxwell was crouched in front of his sons, his voice low but firm, gesturing with his hands as he spoke.

One of the twins—red flannel—was glaring at the ground, while the other—blue flannel—had his arms folded tightly over his chest, face turned away.

Something about the boys’ posture tugged at me—the defiance that came not from malice but from hurt.

I understood that look too well.

And when blue flannel yelled, “I hate you!” and took off down the path around the courtyard, before I even realized it, my feet were already moving.

I followed the sound of rustling leaves around the corner of the courtyard, where a large maple spread its canopy over a carpet of fallen leaves.

Blue flannel sat beneath it, knees drawn up, stabbing a stick into the dirt.

He didn't look up when I approached.

"You planning to dig your way out?" I asked lightly.

He startled, glancing up, then quickly turned his face away again. "Go away."

"Hmm," I said, lowering myself to sit a few feet away from him. "You know, people usually say that when they actually want someone to stay."

"I mean it," he muttered.

"I'm afraid I can't do that," I said. "What if you freeze out here?"

He gave me a sidelong look, unimpressed. "It's not cold."

“Fair point,” I said, leaning back on my hands and gazing up at the rustling canopy.

“You know, you remind me a little of someone I know.”

“The smug kid who tried to shake our hands?”

I huffed, offended on my baby’s behalf. “Daniel was being nice; he doesn’t have a smug bone in his body. You owe him an apology.”

He shrugged, still turning the stick in the dirt.

I rolled my eyes good-naturedly. “Anyway, that’s not who I was talking about.”

“Who then?”

“Me,” I said softly. “I used to hide from my family too. Growing up, I was convinced my parents hated me.”

That made him glance up again. Just barely.

I smiled faintly. "When I was about your age, I thought everyone was better off without me, and it upset me. At some point, I just...shut down. I thought that would make it hurt less."

He frowned. "Did it?"

I exhaled. "No. It just made me lonelier. And lately..." I thought back to the dream I had, to what Paxton said about my father missing me when I was gone. "I think maybe I might not have seen my parents' intentions as clearly as I thought."

He picked at the stick in his hands, silent for a moment.

"I'm not lonely," he said finally. "I have Zach. And Dad."

"But you miss your mom," I supplied gently.

He didn't answer, but the way his jaw clenched was answer enough.

"She read to us before bed," he mumbled. "She let us stay up late on weekends. She made all our favorite foods. Dad was always too busy working. And now...he just tells us what to do and yells when we're bad."

I nodded slowly. "Sometimes parents don't realize that love looks different to kids. Your dad cares, and his way of showing it might not be perfect, but it's the only way he knows how."

Noah's eyes flickered toward me. "Then why's he always mad?"

"Because he's scared," I said softly. "Of getting it wrong. Of losing you, too."

His expression wavered, uncertainty creeping through his stubbornness.

A quiet moment passed, filled only by the wind teasing the leaves above. Noah didn't speak again, but his brows were creased like he was thinking.

Then, behind us, I heard the crunch of footsteps.

Maxwell stopped a few paces away, hands shoved into his pockets, eyes uncertain. "I didn't mean for him to bother you," he said quietly.

"He didn't," I said, rising to my feet. "We were just talking."

Noah looked up at his father, and I saw the tension in Maxwell's shoulders soften just slightly.

"Hey, bud," he said after a moment. "You okay?"

Noah fidgeted. "Yeah."

"You ready to come back?"

A pause. Then, a small nod. "I'll tell the dumbass sorry, too."

Maxwell exhaled in visible relief, his smile faint but genuine. "Go on then."

Noah shot to his feet, and Maxwell ruffled his hair affectionately as he passed.

He looked at me, gratitude flickering across his face. "I don't know what you said to him, but...thank you."

"I just listened," I said. "And reminded him you're doing your best."

His lips twitched ruefully. "My best doesn't always look great. Patience has never been one of my virtues."

"It's not supposed to come easy," I said gently. "It's something you build, like muscle. Slowly, and usually through a lot of frustration and pain." Speaking from experience.

He huffed a quiet laugh. “You sound like a therapist.”

“Then you should probably listen,” I teased.

That drew laughter from him, the kind that carried exhaustion and relief in equal measure.

He glanced down the path Noah took, his eyes soft. “You know, when they were born, I thought I’d have forever to get it right. But it feels like I blinked, and suddenly they’re these...complex creatures with all these feelings I don’t know what to do with.”

There was a faint tremor in his voice—the same one I often heard in my own when I worried about Daniel.

“Anger’s just grief with armor on,” I said quietly. “They’re not trying to hurt you. They’re trying not to hurt themselves.”

He nodded slowly, the words settling in. “Well, if you ever need a job as a live-in pup whisperer...”

I laughed. “I’ll keep that in mind.”