

My Sister 231

Chapter 231 A NOBLE SENTIMENT

LUCIAN'S POV

I arrived later than I intended.

Mostly because I wasted time weighing the pros of seeing Sera against the cons of entering Kieran Blackthorne's territory.

Obviously, the pros won out.

Nightfang's courtyard buzzed—children screeching, parents hovering with plates, the entire pack alive with excitement for the heir's birthday.

The sun drenched the area in Californian light, reflecting off torches and banners, making everything seem sharper and louder.

But none of that could distract me from the only reason I came.

I instantly sought out Sera, attuning my senses to her unique scent and aura.

I wish I didn't.

I wish I had never come.

Because then, I wouldn't have overheard their conversation.

It wasn't even intentional. I turned toward a hidden walkway looking for a quiet vantage point, and the sharp, charged scent of heightened emotions hit me before I saw them.

Then I heard her voice.

Not calm Sera. Not soft Sera. Not the composed woman she always tried to be around me.

No—that voice was trembling with fire.

I know I should have walked away as soon as I realized it was Sera and Kieran. This was absolutely none of my business.

But I edged forward, slowly, silently, enough to see the angle of Kieran's back, the harsh line of his shoulders, and just past him...

Sera.

Flushed, breathless, eyes bright with unshed tears and rage so intense it took my breath away.

Not the way she ever looked at me.

Her emotions around me were always measured, steady, contained beneath layers of self-preservation.

She kept her heart guarded, her reactions controlled. Even at her most vulnerable, she never let herself truly unravel in front of me.

But with Kieran?

Fuck, she was unraveling.

Her chest rose and fell too quickly. The tremor in her hands was visible even from where I stood.

Her voice shook with raw, visceral honesty, stabbing me with every word.

And the bond—fucking hell, I could feel it from here. Like static in the air. A tangible gravitational pull between them.

So it was true.

They were mates.

Not speculation or suspicion.

Definite.

I had prepared for this news. Since that day in OTS when her power spiked and paralyzed me, I knew something had shifted.

I knew she was growing stronger, and with that strength would come clarity about the bond.

But knowing something in your bones and hearing it spoken aloud—especially in her voice—were two very different things.

It hit me like a strike to the gut.

I couldn't take my eyes off Sera. Her cheeks were pink, her lips parted, her eyes bright. Her pulse was visible at her throat.

One might have heard her words, spoken in trembling rage and mistaken her reaction for hatred.

But I'd seen that look before. Had it directed at me a long time ago.

That wasn't the composure of a woman standing before a man she hated.

That was the response of a woman whose mate bond was awake. Alive. Thrumming through every inch of her. The reaction of a lover.

My hands balled into fists.

My competition was now clear as day.

Not Kieran himself, no. I could handle him. Strategize around him. Outsmart him. Outscheme him.

But a mate bond?

A primal force woven into their blood and souls?

That was a battle I had no guarantee of winning.

Rhegan's question from before echoed in my mind.

'So tell me, will you back down because of it?'

And my reply, 'Back down? You know that's not me.'

But now...

Doubt pricked beneath my ribs—unwelcome, unfamiliar, poisonous.

Had I been deluding myself into thinking I had time? That my steady patience, my availability, my unwavering belief in her would eventually carve space in her heart?

Seeing them like this...

No. I wasn't sure anymore.

"I have to go."

I stepped back into the jarring brightness of the courtyard as Sera walked away before they could notice me, heart thudding with something terrifyingly close to despair.

I had told her I would respect her choice.

A noble sentiment, in theory.

But standing here, witnessing this—this bond thrumming between them like a living thing—I realized...

I couldn't let go.

I couldn't watch her be pulled back into the orbit that had once consumed her.

I couldn't allow this to reach a point of no return.

Sera had to become my Luna.

I wouldn't let the Moon Goddess's whims keep her from the future she deserved.

From the future I intended to give her.

A voice cut through my spiraling thoughts.

“Lucian Reed?”

I turned.

Maxwell Cartridge stood a few meters away, brow raised, arms crossed loosely over his chest.

I’d met Maya’s brother briefly when her family arrived to meet the Lockwoods. It wasn’t really a memorable meeting, courteous at best, so I was surprised he would seek me out at a party.

His twins were nowhere in sight—probably terrorizing the dessert table. His expression was measured and composed, but unmistakable surprise flickered in his eyes.

I plastered on a polite, distant smile. “Maxwell.”

He approached slowly. “From all the gossip Maya fed me with, I’m surprised to see you here.”

I fought back an eyeroll. Maya’s penchant for absorbing and redistributing gossip was so off-brand for the rest of her personality that sometimes I wondered if she was even the same person.

“I came for Sera,” I told Maxwell.

Instantly, both our gazes drifted to one place.

Sera stood near the center of the courtyard, Ethan at her side, who was watching Maya with a lovestruck smile while she spoke, gesturing animatedly before them.

Sera laughed at something Maya said. Her shoulders relaxed, her lips curving into a genuine smile—a jarring contrast from the venomous glare she shot Kieran earlier.

Maxwell exhaled softly, a sound somewhere between admiration and longing. Hair rose on the back of my neck. I did not like the way he looked at her.

To him, I imagined, she appeared as she always did to the public eye—a kind, steady, resilient woman who had endured more than anyone should and still managed to radiate warmth.

But to me?

I saw the woman standing on the OTS training mat, power thrumming beneath her skin.

I saw her breaking limits she didn't know she had, softening only long enough to wipe sweat off her brows before charging again.

I saw her pushing against the boundaries of her past and demanding better from her future.

Sera wasn't ordinary.

She was remarkable. A Luna forged from scars and stubborn hope.

Maxwell saw the version of her that made a home warm.

I saw the version of her that could lead a pack into a new era.

Two perspectives, two truths—both entirely different.

My jaw tightened.

"Maxwell," I said quietly, eyes still on Sera, "be honest with me. Do you also plan to pursue her?"

His head whipped toward me, startled enough that he actually choked on his own breath.

“Pursue? Me?” He blinked rapidly. “Lucian, I have two children who climb walls for fun, try to fistfight each other every morning, and believe sleep is for the weak and stupid. When would I have the time to pursue anyone?”

Despite myself, a short, humorless breath escaped me.

He rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Do I think she’s incredible? Absolutely. Do I understand why two Alphas are circling her like territorial bears? Of course.”

He cast a side glance at me, amused and pointed. “But pursuing her? No. I can barely pursue ten minutes of uninterrupted peace.”

His smile faded, replaced by something gentler. “Besides, for a woman like Sera, a man’s affection is the least impressive thing he could offer. What matters more is who she wants to become. And whether the man beside her helps her become that—or cages her.”

I felt the implication of his words like a blade gliding beneath skin.

Sera’s words filtered in from the last day at OTS. ‘I want to leave for a while...I want to see who I am outside of everyone’s expectations.’

Maxwell looked at me with a quiet understanding that rankled. “Maya tells me you’re a strategist, Lucian. You’re always three steps ahead, always pulling strings, always controlling outcomes. But Sera...” He shook his head. “She’s not a chess piece.”

My jaw clenched. The idea of this near-stranger schooling me was grating on my nerves. “You think I don’t know that?”

“I think you know it,” he said evenly. “But I also think you don’t know how to stop trying to control everything around you.”

I stiffened.

His gaze held mine, steady, unflinching. “Even the Moon Goddess leaves room for uncertainty. For choice. She gives us bonds but does not punish those who reject them.”

A cold, sharp silence settled between us.

The air crackled with unspoken tension. I wasn’t sure if he was cautioning me—for Sera’s sake—or for my own.

Either way, I knew one thing: I couldn’t be friends with Maxwell Cartridge.

I admired his sister, and she was one of the few people I trusted to have my back, but—

My train of thought was interrupted when a high-pitched voice echoed from across the yard, breaking the tension.

“PRESENTS!”

Daniel barreled toward the gift table at full speed, nearly knocking over a stack of cupcakes on the way. His friends followed, a stampede of tiny pups shrieking with excitement.

Parents gathered, forming a semicircle. The atmosphere warmed instantly, a mix of the kind of pride and joy that children’s milestones summoned.

Sera moved toward the table with Maya and Ethan trailing behind her, her expression softening as she watched her son bounce in place, glowing with anticipation.

Kieran joined them from the opposite side, posture protective, eyes fixed on his son—but flickering, every so often, toward Sera.

As she knelt beside Daniel to help him open the first gift—her hair falling over her shoulder, her smile bright—I felt the truth settle in me with the weight of an anchor.

I wasn't ready to lose her.

Not to fate.

Not to Kieran.

Not to anyone.