

My Sister 236

Chapter 236: TAKE CARE OF YOU

SERAPHINA'S POV

The courtyard emptied slowly, voices tapering into soft murmurs, torches burning low. The air still vibrated faintly with the residue of the rituals—the blessings, the power, the pride.

Daniel's name lingered in the air like smoke.

Ethan and Maya only left after I assured them I was fine and Maya extracted a promise from me to call her when I got home.

When the last of the pack members bowed and departed, Nightfang settled into a rare hush.

Daniel would stay overnight in the pack house—customary for a newly recognized heir. A tradition symbolizing the child's first night under the roof they would one day lead.

I followed him up the stairs, our footsteps muffled by the soft runner carpet. He walked ahead of me with a swagger he'd never had before, his small shoulders pulled back like he was twice his size.

When we reached his room, he swept his arm out and pushed the door open with an exaggerated flourish.

I held back a chuckle. "Need help changing? That outfit was a nightmare to get on."

"I can change by myself, Mom." He looked over his shoulder, grinning with all the pride of a kid who'd just been handed a kingdom. "I'm an heir now. Heirs don't need help with buttons."

I raised an eyebrow, crossing my arms. "Oh? Well then, I guess I'm not needed here. I'll just head home."

He was halfway through pulling his ceremonial sash over his head when he suddenly froze in place, his arms tangled in the fabric.

“No, wait—” he rushed out, voice several octaves higher. Then he caught himself and cleared his throat, trying to sound controlled. “I mean...you can stay.” He shrugged. “If you want.”

I bit back a smile as I set his overnight bag by his bed. “Only if the mighty heir permits.”

Daniel puffed out his chest. “Permission granted.”

He tugged off the rest of his ceremonial clothes with clumsy hands and a heroic level of effort, occasionally getting stuck in a sleeve or tripping over the slacks around his ankles.

Every time I reached forward to help, he’d shoo me away—only to ask for help ten seconds later.

When he was finally in soft cotton pajamas, he flopped onto the bed dramatically.

“I’m exhausted,” he moaned into his pillow. “Ceremonies take forever.”

I sat beside him, smoothing back a curl stuck to his forehead. “You did wonderfully.”

He rolled onto his back, staring at the ceiling. “Mom?”

“Yes, baby?”

His voice dropped to a whisper. “Did you see me? At the end? When I reached the end of the path?”

My heart pulled tight. “Of course I did. No one could take their eyes off you.”

“I felt like...” He paused, trying to put something complex into small, ten-year-old words. “Like something changed. Like something...woke up. Inside me.”

“That’s part of it,” I murmured. “Part of becoming heir.”

“But it didn’t feel scary,” he said, eyes drifting shut, lashes casting soft shadows on his cheeks. “It felt like...like I was becoming who I’m supposed to be. Even if I’m not there yet.”

I cupped his cheek gently. “That’s exactly what it means.”

Daniel opened his eyes again, slowly lifting his head off the pillow to meet my gaze.

“And when you put your hand on my head, during Dad’s wolf blessing... I don’t know. It felt like...” His small fingers tapped his chest. “Like you were inside me. Like you were keeping me safe even from the inside.”

Emotion clogged my throat. “That’s what a mother does.”

Daniel pushed up suddenly, sitting cross-legged. “Mom?”

“Yes?”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Always.”

He hesitated. “Why did Ashar...come to you like that? That wasn’t like we practiced.”

My breath caught.

I swallowed slowly. "I'm not sure why. I guess...your dad just wanted me to be part of the ritual."

Daniel studied me quietly, his dark eyes piercing as intensely as Kieran's.

Finally, he nodded, letting it go.

I let out the breath I'd been holding.

A comfortable silence settled over us then. I brushed my thumb over the back of his hand. I needed to do this now. Before I lost my courage.

"Danny...there's something I want to talk to you about."

He turned to look at me fully, attentive the way he always was when he sensed something important.

"I'm going to be traveling soon."

His brows shot up. "Where?"

"I'm not sure yet," I admitted. "I just know I need to go. For myself. To grow. To figure...things out."

A second passed.

Then another.

Daniel looked down, playing with the edge of his blanket.

"Will—will you be gone long?"

I shook my head and pulled him close, clinging to his warmth. "I could never be separated from you for long. I promise I'll be back soon, before Christmas."

Yeah, that seemed like enough time to get my head straight.

Daniel exhaled. "But...you know you don't need my permission."

My breath hitched. "I know, baby. I just... I didn't want you to feel like I was running away."

He shook his head. "You're my mom. I know you would never run from me."

The sting behind my eyes sharpened. "Yes, baby. Never forget that."

"I'll miss you," he whispered, leaning into me. "So, so much."

I wrapped him tightly in my arms. "I'll miss you too, my love."

"But..." He sniffed. "I want you to go."

I froze. "You do?"

He nodded, burying his face in my shoulder. "You're always taking care of me, and Dad, and everyone." He pulled back, wiping his eyes with the heel of his palm, and looked at me with renewed conviction. "Go take care of you. And then come back to me."

A sob climbed up my throat, threatening to break loose. I kissed his forehead instead.

"Thank you," I whispered. "You have no idea what that means to me."

We held each other for a long moment, but eventually, Daniel's yawns grew too big to suppress.

I tucked him into bed, gently pulling the blanket up to his chin. As his eyes fluttered, he reached out and grabbed my fingers one last time, briefly squeezing them before letting his grip go slack and surrendering to sleep.

“Good night, little Alpha,” I whispered, placing one last kiss on his temple.

When I stepped out into the hallway, the door clicking shut behind me, my chest was tight and aching, but...lighter.

I took one step—and froze.

Kieran stood directly outside the door. Hands shoved into his pockets. Shoulders tight. Eyes dark and unreadable.

Right on cue, the bond thrashed so sharply it felt like someone had reached inside my chest and twisted.

“Kieran,” I exhaled.

“Sera.” He took a small step forward. “I just wanted to say...what Ashar did—what happened earlier...” He sighed. “I’m sorry.”

I shook my head; the motion felt choppy. “You don’t have to apologize.”

“Yes, I do,” he said softly. “I told him to hold back. I told him tonight wasn’t about us. But when he saw you...” Kieran’s eyes flickered with something raw. “He didn’t want to hurt the ceremony. He just...needed to be near you.”

The bond shivered.

So did I.

I didn't have words, so I just nodded, hoping that was that.

His jaw flexed. "I...I was hoping you would stay. Tonight. Here. With Daniel."

And me.

He didn't add that, but I heard it loud and clear in the desperate hope in his eyes.

My throat tightened. "I can't."

"Sera—"

"Kieran." My voice cracked in a way that betrayed too much.

I hated how close he was. Hated how my pulse tripped. Hated how the heat of him seeped into my skin without even touching me.

"It's been a long day. I'm completely drained. I just want to go home."

Something shattered in his eyes even as his expression shuttered—like glass breaking behind a closed door.

"Sera..."

His hand twitched at his side, fingers curling slightly, as though he wanted to reach for me. But he stopped himself, forcing his arm to remain still.

I stepped around him, heart clawing at my ribs, the bond pulling so tightly it felt like walking against gravity.

As I passed him, his voice followed me.

“I’ll wait,” he said softly. “However long it takes.”

The bond quaked.

I didn’t answer. Couldn’t.

I made it down the stairs and out into the cool night air—every step a fight, every breath a battle.