

## My Sister 240

Chapter 240: SIMPLY EXISTING

Maya had gone through the five stages of grief when I told her I was leaving.

Denial: “Absolutely not! You’re not leaving me again! Life is so fucking boring without you!”

Anger: “I blame Kieran! I blame your fucking family! I blame you, dammit!”

Bargaining: “Okay. Can I come with you? I know it’s about self-discovery, but what if I don’t make a peep? You won’t even know I’m there.”

Depression: “How am I supposed to survive without you? I’ll die before you return, Sera, die!”

Acceptance: “Ugh, fine. Go. Can I at least throw you a send-off party?”

I’d broken her heart by refusing. I didn’t want to drag things out, and I didn’t want to bear the strange, aching weight of goodbyes.

The morning I set off was disarmingly peaceful. Soft LA sunlight filtered through the curtains in warm ribbons, catching the dust motes floating lazily in the air.

The house was still, quiet enough that I could hear my own heartbeat—a steady, determined rhythm reminding me this was really happening.

My suitcase sat by the front door, neatly packed.

Inside were small pieces of everyone who cared about me.

Maya had slipped in an entire “anti-anxiety travel kit” including more good luck charm moonstones, herbal mints, a ridiculous lavender-scented neck pillow shaped like a llama for some reason, and a handwritten note that said, “If you make a new best friend, I’ll astral-project myself to smack you.”

Daniel had once again given me Wolfy. He didn’t make a big deal out of it—just shoved the plush into my hands the night before and muttered, “So you don’t get lonely.”

He’d also made me a small compass out of scraps he must have found in Nightfang’s workshop. It wasn’t pretty, but the needle worked, and he’d tested it at least a dozen times before giving it to me.

"So you always find your way back," he said, forcing a brave face that didn’t match his worried eyes.

Lucian had been vague during our goodbye, saying his gift couldn’t go through airport security and would be waiting for me when I got to my destination.

As for Kieran...

Well, his concession was gift enough.

With those, and Alina’s steady warmth inside me, I felt prepared.

Well, as prepared as I could be.

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The flight to Seattle was uneventful, the sky outside the window shifting from LA’s golden warmth to the muted, rain-washed grays of the Pacific Northwest.

By the time the plane descended, the world below was a watercolor of mist-shrouded evergreens, glass buildings streaked with drizzle, and streets glistening like polished stone.

The air that greeted me when I stepped out of the terminal was cool and damp, carrying the scent of pine and ocean salt, so different from LA's dry sun and smog-tinged heat.

The taxi ride downtown wound through narrow streets lined with cozy cafés, indie bookstores, and people bundled in layers despite it being barely autumn.

The clouds hung low, as if the sky were brushing the tops of the buildings, and everything felt softer, quieter, more introspective.

When I arrived at the little street-corner café we'd agreed on, Elaine was already there, fidgeting with a bouquet that was far too extravagant for a casual welcome.

She spotted me instantly.

"SERAPHINA!" she squealed, nearly knocking over her own latte as she stood.

I laughed and hugged her tightly.

My editor and I had spoken hundreds of times over video calls, exchanged countless drafts, fought over deadlines, cried over character deaths, and swooned over happily-ever-afters.

But meeting her in person felt surreal.

She was shorter than I'd imagined. Brighter. A little fidgety, even though she tried to act composed.

"I'm so happy you made it," she said breathlessly. "Oh! These are for you. And, here, this is from the team. And this is—right, careful, it's heavy—"

She piled gift after gift into my arms: a stack of customized journals, a custom fountain pen, a hand-knit scarf, fancy chocolates that smelled too rich even through the packaging.

“You didn’t have to bring all this,” I protested.

She waved a hand dramatically. “You’re my bestselling author. You’re a major source of my Christmas bonus.”

I snorted. “Fair enough.”

The rest of the morning was a whirlwind of her excited rambling and my attempts not to get overwhelmed.

Elaine was, in many ways, everything I admired about humans.

Vibrant. Expressive. Unapologetically sentimental. Her emotions lived on the surface of her skin, bright and fleeting yet sincere.

She walked me through Pike Place Market, where the smell of fish and roasted coffee mingled in a way that was both strange and relaxing.

We tried samples of local pastries, watched a man carve tiny soap sculptures, and took photos by the harbor, even though I usually hated posing.

By noon, I felt lighter than I had in weeks.

We passed a bookstore on our way to the art district.

I stopped in my tracks.

My latest novel, *Moonlit Pact*, was still displayed in the front window, three copies stacked neatly beneath a handwritten recommendation card. Two customers stood beside it, flipping through the pages.

One woman murmured, “I swear her stories always give me this weird emotional boost.”

The other nodded. “Right? Like they make me feel...seen.”

Elaine grinned at me. “If I told them the author was standing right there, they’d faint.”

I sputtered. “Do not.”

“Oh, trust me, I won’t. I have no interest in being trampled to death by your fanbase.”

We shared a laugh, but inside, something warm and steady settled in my chest.

This—writing, creating worlds, guiding strangers through emotions I had once drowned in—was mine.

One of the few things in my life that I had chosen for myself. Outside of expectations and pack politics and mate bonds.

For dinner, Elaine insisted on taking me to an avant-garde restaurant that looked more like a gallery than a place where people ate.

Each table was shaped differently. The lighting changed colors depending on where you stood. The menu was on a screen embedded in the table with animated illustrations. Every dish looked like modern art—and tasted like something an eccentric chef made on a dare.

But it was amazing.

Humans around us laughed too loudly, flirted boldly, argued passionately about politics and poetry and whatever else mattered in their brief, blazing lives.

Their emotions weren’t subtle. They weren’t hidden. They weren’t bound by instinct or hierarchy.

They were simply existing—freely.

And I felt that freedom brushing against my skin, too, almost as if I could absorb some of it by sheer proximity.

“This city’s been weird lately,” Elaine said casually during a lull in conversation, spearing a piece of neon-green something. “There’ve been a few animal attacks. Or what the news is calling animal attacks.”

A prickle crawled up my spine.

“What kind?” I asked carefully.

“Oh, you know. Vague descriptions. Half-eaten carcasses. Footprints nobody can identify. The usual Pacific Northwest horror-movie fuel.” She shrugged. “Most of it it is bullshit fear-mongering if you ask me. But just be careful walking around alone, okay?”

“I will,” I promised.

But the unease in my gut didn’t fade. I tried to push it aside; ignore it.

I wanted—needed—to believe this Chapter of my life wouldn’t immediately spiral into chaos.

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It was near midnight when I walked back toward my hotel, the city lights painting the wet pavement in shimmering reflections. My breath puffed in the cool air, misty and soft.

I took a shortcut through an alley flanked by brick walls and fire escapes. Probably not smart after Elaine’s warning, but I knew how to take care of myself, nothing nearby smelled threatening.

Or so I thought.

Halfway through the alley, a low, desperate whimper echoed behind a dumpster.

I froze.

Another sound followed—bootsteps, several pairs, moving fast.

Then voices.

“Grab him!”

“Hold him down.”

“Careful—he’s twitching again.”

I peered around the corner.

Four men dressed head-to-toe in black tactical gear were restraining a figure on the ground—a thin, scruffy male whose clothes hung off him like wilted rags. His hair was matted, his skin bruised and pale, but the scent—

My breath hitched.

Werewolf.

Omega.

One of the men kicked him in the ribs when he tried to crawl away. Another produced a syringe filled with a shimmering silver liquid.

The third man, most likely the leader, spoke in a clipped, cold tone.

“Keep him still. We need the specimen alive.”

Specimen.

The word slammed into me like physical force.

What the fuck had I stumbled upon?