

My Sister 246

Chapter 246: A DIFFERENT BEAST

SERAPHINA'S POV

After that cryptic reply, Maxwell didn't say anything else.

He just stood there, hands braced on the stone ledge, eyes fixed on the jagged horizon where the mountains tore open the sky.

A slight wind tugged at his jacket, ruffling his dark hair, carrying the faint scent of sandalwood and a hint of amber.

Silence stretched long enough that guilt pricked the back of my throat.

I shouldn't have asked.

I'd pushed too far, too fast. His story was intimate, vulnerable—something he hadn't owed me at all.

I, of all people, knew what a sore spot the topic of relationships was.

"I'm sorry," I started quietly. "You don't have to—"

"No," he said, cutting me off gently.

He straightened, exhaling a long breath that seemed to deflate something inside him.

"You asked a fair question."

I stayed quiet, giving him the space he needed.

Maxwell rubbed the back of his neck, eyes flicking skyward. "Romance is...easy," he began. "Intoxicating. It sweeps you up. Makes you feel bulletproof. Invincible."

His mouth twisted into a wry, almost weary smile. "But marriage? Marriage is a different beast entirely."

I blinked. The shift in tone—reflective, edged with old hurt—made something in me perk up, attentive.

"All Willow's reservations evaporated once we got together," he continued. "We were in love. Deeply. Passionately. Recklessly. And for a while, that was enough. Until it wasn't."

A knot formed in my stomach.

His eyes dimmed with the weight of memory. "We weren't prepared. For the world. For responsibilities. For parenthood."

My breath hitched. His implication was loud and clear.

The twins were just like Daniel.

Miracles, yes. Blessings, definitely.

But unexpected. Unplanned.

Maxwell gave a humorless laugh. "We told ourselves we were ready. We believed that if we loved each other enough, everything else would fall into place. I was naïve. I figured I could balance Beta duties, pack responsibilities, then come home and be the perfect partner and father."

His jaw flexed. "I promised Willow we would be happy. I proposed with every ounce of confidence a young idiot could possibly have."

My heart sank gently, a slow descent in tandem with the inevitable downward spiral to come.

“Our matching was destiny,” he murmured. “A bond forged by our souls. Fate.” He shrugged one shoulder. “And for a while, it did feel that way. Our marriage was blissful. Beautiful. Perfect.”

He paused.

“But life doesn’t freeze in that perfect moment.”

I swallowed hard. “What changed?”

Maxwell opened his mouth—

And his phone rang. A sharp, brisk sound that cut clean through the moment, slightly startling me.

He grimaced and checked the screen.

“Alpha Callister,” he muttered. “Sorry, I have to take this.”

He answered with a professional tone I wasn’t used to hearing from him. I stepped aside politely, not intending to eavesdrop, but it wasn’t hard to guess the content from the clipped ‘Yes, sir’s and ‘Understood’s.

Work. Duty. Responsibilities that didn’t pause for heartbreak.

When Maxwell hung up, the softness had drained from his face, replaced by Beta sharpness.

“I have to go,” he said, apologetic. “My task here can’t wait.”

My disappointment surprised me, but I masked it with a small nod. “Right. Of course. I’ve already taken up so much of your time.”

He hesitated.

For a moment, he looked like he wanted to say more—to finish the story, to give context, to reassure me that not all mate-bonds crumble under pressure.

Instead, he just offered a gentle smile and tucked his hands into his pockets. “Take care, Sera. And if you need anything while you’re here, just give me a call.”

“I will,” I whispered.

He gave a slight bow of his head, then strode away, boots crunching against the gravel path.

I watched him go until he disappeared behind a stand of more crimson-leaved maples.

The breeze picked up, chilling the skin at the nape of my neck. And suddenly the space he left behind felt strangely heavy.

So even fated mates—those blessed by the Moon Goddess, those whose love stories began with lightning and destiny—could break apart.

Could love deeply and still fall out of rhythm. Could share everything and still fracture under the weight of real life.

Maxwell and Willow had loved fiercely. They’d been destined.

And yet—

The ache of the bond in my chest didn't care about boundaries or timing. It pulsed anyway—quiet, stubborn, inescapable.

What if Kieran and I had known the truth ten years ago?

What if we'd recognized the mate-bond the night it mattered most? What if Celeste hadn't stood between us? What if we hadn't built a decade of resentment before we ever learned what we meant to each other?

Would things really have been different?

Would fate have saved us from ourselves?

Or would we have ended up just like we are now? Just like Maxwell and Willow—two people united by destiny but unraveled by circumstance?

My stomach twisted.

I shoved the thought away. I couldn't handle it. Not now. Not when I'd barely begun figuring out how I felt, who I was, what I wanted.

As if sensing the need for distraction, my phone buzzed.

A new email notification lit the screen:

New Moon Institute—Library Access Request: Approved.

My breath left me in a soft, relieved rush.

Good. Perfect.

Something to focus on. Something that wasn't tangled with the bond or marriage or the echoes of kisses that still burned beneath my skin.

The research library at the Institute had been described to me as the most comprehensive collection of supernatural knowledge on the continent. More complete than the Frostbane archives.

Definitely less restricted, less filtered, less tainted by family politics and centuries of gatekeeping.

If answers existed anywhere, they existed here.

I tucked my phone into my pocket and headed toward the towering building on the far edge of campus.

The closer I got, the quieter the world became. Conversations softened. Footsteps slowed. The air thickened with a kind of reverence, like stepping into a church or temple.

The library was enormous—built of stone and glass, with high arched windows that caught the mountain light. Vines clung to the lower walls, and ancient wolf sigils were etched subtly into the stone near the entrance, their lines worn smooth by time.

I paused at the foot of the stairs. My pulse fluttered, a mix of anticipation and nerves.

"Here goes nothing," I murmured.

Alina hummed deep inside me, a warm, steady note of encouragement.

I climbed the steps and pushed open the heavy doors