

My Sister 248

Chapter 248 THE SAME PATH

SERAPHINA'S POV

The director's office looked nothing like I'd imagined.

For someone reputed to be a genius, a visionary, the quiet architect of the Institute's most advanced research, I expected something grand: vaulted ceilings, ancient tomes, maybe a glowing crystal wolf statue in the corner for dramatic effect.

Instead, the office was...mundane.

A narrow hallway with polished floors. A plain wooden door with a brass nameplate. A potted fern that had seen better days.

And Lionel.

The director's assistant was tall and sharply put-together, with neatly parted brown hair and round gold-rimmed glasses that made him look permanently judgmental.

He spotted me the moment I stepped into the entryway. His hazel eyes flicked over me with quick, appraising precision, the kind that made it clear he'd already decided exactly who—and what—I was before I'd even spoken.

"Welcome," he said in a flat tone. "Do you have an appointment with Director Alois?"

I shook my head. "No, actually, but I was hoping to speak with him—"

"Name?" he interrupted, a pen already poised above a clipboard.

"Seraphina Blackthorne."

He blinked. His entire posture shifted, straightening like someone had tugged an invisible string attached to his spine.

"Blackthorne," he repeated, reverence seeping into his voice. "As in Kieran Blackthorne? Alpha of the Nightfang Pack?"

I cleared my throat, ignoring the pang that shot through me at the mention of Kieran. "Well, yes, but—"

"Wow," Lionel gushed, his eyes brightening with awe. "It's truly an honor to meet you, Luna Blackthorne."

Shit.

“Um...actually, I don’t answer to that title. And...” Heat crept up the back of my neck. “Kieran and I are divorced.”

Something cold flickered behind his eyes.

“And...your affiliation with Nightfang?”

I pursed my lips. “Dissolved.”

The transformation was instantaneous.

Interest extinguished. Respect evaporated. The polite smile thinned into something disdainful.

“A packless divorcée,” he murmured, as if diagnosing a terminal condition. “Well. That’s...unfortunate.”

My fingers curled at my sides. “Does that affect whether I can speak with the director?”

“It affects everything,” he said, the sweetness in his tone dissolving into vinegar. “Director Alois does not meet with unscheduled visitors. Especially not...” He eyed me like he was trying to figure out what fungal species I was. “...outsiders.”

"I'm not an outsider," I said evenly. "I might not be affiliated with a pack, but I'm affiliated with Out of The Shadows organization. I'm visiting the institute on a personal recommendation from Alpha Lucian Reed."

Lionel laughed.

Actually threw his head back and guffawed.

"Oh, you mean Lucian Reed's pet project?" he drawled. "Yes, I'm aware of it. A glorified charity center for strays and defects. Very noble. Very sentimental. Very futile."

I gritted my teeth. "Excuse me?"

Lionel lifted his chin, warming to his own arrogance. "Bloodline determines a wolf's worth from birth. Not whatever little rehabilitation program Reed is running. Dress up a mutt as much as you want, but it will never stand up to a purebred."

Alina snapped to attention inside me, hackles rising. 'Let me at him. I'll show him what a mutt is.'

I was very, very tempted to let Alina's ire run free and smack the condescending smirk off Lionel's bird-like face.

But I held back. My hands tightened until my knuckles ached.

“Your opinions are yours,” I gritted out. “I’m not here for a debate.”

“No, of course not,” he said with an exasperated sigh, like I was the one getting on his last nerve.
“You’re here to waste the director’s time.”

“You don’t know why I’m here.”

“I don’t need to,” he sniffed. “The director’s schedule is full. If you want to browse the institute, by all means—but this office is not for you.”

Alina growled, a low, lethal hum.

“Just give me five minutes with him.” I hated the pleading in my tone. I hated being at the mercy of this dickhead.

“Absolutely not.” Lionel flicked his hand dismissively toward the exit. “Good day, Ms. Blackthorne.” His nose wrinkled. “You should consider reverting to your maiden name. Deceitfully parading such a noble name around can be considered fraud.”

I inhaled sharply through my nose. I was going to ram his clipboard straight into his pompous skull.

I opened my mouth, ready to deliver the kind of scathing verbal blow Maya would have applauded—

“Lionel.”

A soft voice drifted from the back room.

Lionel turned towards the sound. “D-Director Alois, sir. Were we too loud? Did we interrupt your work?”

But Director Alois paid no mind to Lionel as he stepped out from behind the door.

Although a little smaller than I expected, he looked exactly like I imagined. Like someone who’d spent most of his life buried in research—slightly hunched, sleeves smudged with ink, expression worn but alert.

His eyes—clear, pale amber, sharp despite the soft sag of age—landed on my face with startling intensity, and something in them lit up.

Like recognition.

“Oh,” he murmured. “So the visitor I was expecting has finally arrived.”

My pulse stumbled.

Lionel sputtered, “Sir—she came without an appointment. Surely, she isn’t who—”

Alois lifted one thin, wrinkled hand.

Lionel fell silent immediately.

The director studied me for a long, unsettling moment. Not like I was a puzzle or anomaly. More like...someone remembering.

“Oh, the resemblance is uncanny,” he murmured.

I blinked. “What?”

“Edward Lockwood’s daughter, correct?”

My breath caught so sharply it hurt.

Lionel stiffened, his eyes widening. “W-What?”

He turned his panicked gaze to his boss. “S-sir, I had no idea. I would have—”

“Leave us,” the director said gently, his attention never wavering from me.

“But sir—”

“Now, Lionel.”

The arrogant assistant deflated, bowed stiffly, and vanished down the corridor without looking at me.

I managed to find my voice. “How did you...”

Alois’ lips pulled into a faint smile. “Come. Walk with me.”

Without waiting for a reaction, he turned and moved toward a set of glass doors leading outside.

I followed.

The garden below the director's office was nothing like the manicured lawns of the Lockwood estate or the structured training grounds of Nightfang.

It was wild. Greenery spilling over stone paths. Vines curling lazily around archways. Beds of herbs and flowers planted in no discernible pattern, yet somehow forming a cohesive whole.

Birds chattered in the canopy overhead, and a small fountain gurgled quietly near a cluster of benches.

Alois strolled, hands clasped behind him, as if he had his whole life to take this walk. The morning light caught in his silver-streaked hair and the fine creases at the corners of his eyes.

"You have questions," he said.

Dozens.

Hundreds.

All clamoring beneath my ribs, demanding attention.

“My father...” My voice was thin. “Did you know him?”

Alois hummed. “In my own way.”

“What does that even—”

He raised a finger, stopping me mid-sentence without even looking at me.

“Look at the buildings,” he said.

I blinked. “Sorry?”

He gestured lightly to the institute grounds surrounding us—the sweeping rooflines, the carved stonework, the ancient sigils embedded in the archways.

“What do you see?” he asked.

I frowned, caught off-balance by the shift. “They’re beautiful.”

“And?”

“And?”

“What else?”

I hesitated. I came here to ask questions. Why was I the one being interrogated?

But Alois had the patience of a man sure he would live forever. Something told me I couldn't rush this encounter.

So I let my honest reply tumble out. “They feel...intentional. Personal. Whoever built this place put a piece of themselves in it. They wanted everyone who visited to do the same. They wanted it to feel alive.”

Alois's smile deepened, soft and knowing.

“You have Edward's eyes,” he said. “But young Margaret's zeal.”

My stomach dropped straight through the earth.

He didn't just know my father.

He knew both my parents.

It was like every step I took closer to the truth only tangled me further in a history that ran deeper than I'd realized.

"What—how—why did my father come here?" I demanded, unable to hold back the dam of questions any longer. "What was he researching? What is the Origins Archives Room? Why were his records redacted? What did he—"

Alois held up a hand again.

The questions died in my throat.

His gaze softened—gentle, but threaded with something weary.

"You will not find the answers you seek in the Hall of Memories," he murmured.

I almost told the elderly director of the New Moon Institute, 'No shit.'

"Yeah, I know. That's why I'm trying to find—"

He reached into the long inner pocket of his coat and withdrew something.

A bookmark.

Simple, rectangular, embossed with faint silver lines forming a pattern I couldn't make out. It shimmered faintly under the garden's filtered sunlight.

He placed it in my hand.

The metal was cool. It was heavier than it looked.

"You want to know about the Origins Archives," he said.

I swallowed. "Yes."

"Then you must earn the right to enter."

My brows knit together. "Earn?"

Alois chuckled. "Knowledge of that magnitude is not simply given to those who ask. It is entrusted."

He stepped back, his amber eyes glinting with something almost mischievous.

"If you wish to find what your father sought, you must tread the same path he did. You must retrieve something first."

"What?" I asked, holding my breath.

"Bring me the item before sunrise tomorrow." His smile turned cryptic. "And the door you seek will open."

My fingers tightened around the bookmark.

"What item?" I pressed.

But Alois was already turning away.

"No later than sunrise," he called over his shoulder.

And without another word, he walked back toward the building, leaving me alone in the garden with more questions than I'd come with.