

My Sister 289

Chapter 289 LIKE A GUILTY TEENAGER

KIERAN'S POV

Gavin didn't knock; he rarely did when he knew I was alone.

I was reviewing patrol schedules when he paused just inside the office, arms crossed, wearing that deliberately neutral look that always signaled he was about to drop something significant.

"They've been delivered."

I didn't look up right away, but my pen paused, hovering over the page—then continued its stroke as if nothing had changed. Only when I finished the line did I set it down and lift my gaze.

"Confirmed?"

"Yes," he said. "Exactly as you specified."

No crest. No signature. No trail that led back to Nightfang—or me.

“And?” I asked.

Gavin shifted, his gaze darting to the window and back, searching my face for the question I wouldn’t voice: How did Sera react?

“They weren’t received by Sera herself.”

I went rigid. Irritation flared instinctively, sharp and ugly.

I leaned back in my chair, muscles tensed. “Who did?”

“Maya.”

A breath slipped free, and the knot in my shoulders loosened a fraction.

Not quite relief. But close enough to count.

“Good,” I said.

Better, honestly.

Sera might have questioned the butterflies, hesitant to accept them without knowing their origin.

But I was willing to bet anything that Maya recognized them immediately, and I doubted Sera would reject anything that bore her best friend's stamp of approval.

I nodded once. "That will be all."

Gavin didn't move.

Instead, he hummed low, leaning against the doorframe with an infuriating air of ease.

"So," he said, "when did you become the kind of Alpha who sends anonymous gifts like a guilty teenager?"

I shot him a flat look. "You're still here."

"Unfortunately," he replied with a grin.

I steepled my fingers on the desk. "Make your point."

"Oh, I intend to," Gavin said. "Lunewing Butterflies aren't exactly an impulse buy. Rare, powerful, and incredibly hard to acquire. You burned favors for those. You could've at least attached your name."

"I chose not to."

"Mm-hmm." He tilted his head. "Why?"

I straightened slowly, resting my forearms on the desk. "The important thing isn't who sent them," I said instead. "It's that they help Sera."

He raised a brow. "You don't think she'll figure it out?"

"Eventually," I admitted. "But by then, they'll already be doing their work."

A pause stretched. Gavin's humor faded, replaced by a sharper, more searching look.

"You're serious," he said.

I met his eyes. "About Sera? Always."

“No,” he corrected quietly. “About not needing the credit.”

My jaw tightened.

I didn’t answer.

Because the truth was both simple and deeply uncomfortable.

If Sera turned away a gift simply because it came from me, I wasn’t sure how I’d handle it.

Besides, the Lunewings hadn’t even been my idea.

Margaret had mentioned them weeks ago, her tone carefully casual when she brought it up.

She’d come to my office without an appointment.

That alone was out of character.

She stood across from my desk, hands clasped at her waist, posture immaculate—but she didn't sit when I gestured to the chair.

Her gaze wandered, tracing the room's edges as if she needed to anchor herself or steady something internal.

"Have you heard of Lunewing Butterflies?" she asked at last, smoothing an already smooth sleeve. "They're rare. Lunar-affiliated."

I frowned. "Vaguely. Why?"

She hadn't answered immediately. Her fingers tightened together, a brief, involuntary press, as if she was bracing against something sharp.

"They have powerful restorative potency," she said, eyes fixed on a point just over my shoulder. "They would make a perfect gift for someone going through intense...changes."

For Seraphina.

She hadn't said the name. She hadn't needed to.

Margaret Lockwood was in many ways like Leona Blackthorne. She never begged. She never pleaded. She framed necessity as suggestion and let others bear the weight of choice.

But she hadn't been able to mask the importance or urgency behind her offhandedness.

The fact that she'd come herself—when distance would have been easier, when a message could have allowed her to keep her voice steady and her expression unreadable—was proof enough.

I'd reassured her then that I'd look into it. I'd do anything for Sera.

Margaret exhaled, her shoulders dropping slightly, as if she'd finally set down a burden she'd been carrying.

Lunewings didn't circulate on open markets. They were protected, bound to old lunar nexuses, traded only through favors that came with strings sharp enough to draw blood.

I'd pulled those strings anyway. Called in debts. Traded future ones. Spent political capital I would've once hoarded jealously.

Originally, I had intended them as another Christmas gift. I was going to present them quietly, privately, away from the buzz of the party.

But last night, watching Sera on the balcony, her face lifted to the sky as fireworks blossomed overhead, I realized she wouldn't accept them as I'd hoped.

She'd been radiant at first—genuinely delighted by the fireworks.

Then, slowly, almost imperceptibly, something in her shifted.

Her smile had faltered. Her eyes had softened into something fragile. Sadness had crept in like a rising tide.

Not because she disliked the gift.

Because it forced her to see what I was capable of—and what I hadn't given her before.

I watched that realization settle in her chest, saw it shadow her face.

And it had nearly undone me.

Gavin cleared his throat, amusement tugging at the corners of his lips. "Did you seriously just zone out thinking about her?"

"Get out," I said flatly.

He pushed off the wall. “You know,” he said lightly, “she’s changed you.”

I lifted my gaze slowly. “Choose your next words carefully.”

His smile widened, unfazed. “Relax. I’m not criticizing. I don’t hate this version of you.”

That earned him another glare.

“Sera did what Celeste never managed,” he continued. “She made you careful. You don’t just act anymore—you consider, weigh consequences.”

My fingers curled slowly, and I looked away.

Because, damn him, he wasn’t wrong.

I used to move without hesitation. Decide. Take. End things cleanly and live with the fallout.

If someone got hurt along the way, that was collateral—unfortunate, but acceptable.

It killed me to admit that, too often in the past, Seraphina had been that collateral.

But now, collateral damage was no longer an option.

Now, she shadowed every decision. Every move forced me to wonder if it would steady her or break her, give her space or trap her in another corner she never chose.

“Get out,” I repeated, the command lacking bite.

Gavin grinned, his hand on the doorknob. “Gladly. But for the record? I hope she chooses you.”

I didn’t respond.

The door closed behind Gavin, leaving the office empty once more.

I leaned back, staring at the far wall, my reflection faintly visible in the glass.

Seraphina had promised me an answer after she returned.

She’d said she needed time. Space.

Last night when we picked her up from the airport, I'd believed, truly, that I still had a chance.

Now?

Now, with the image of her expression during the fireworks burned into my brain—along with the soft, sweet smile she'd given Lucian as she fit his bracelet around her wrist—I wasn't so sure.

For the first time in a long while, Alpha Kieran Blackthorne wasn't certain of victory.