

My Sister 336

Chapter 336 NOT MY PLACE

SERAPHINA'S POV

I was not the Luna of Nightfang.

I had chosen Kieran again—carefully, slowly, on my terms. Those terms did not include slipping into a role that had never been mine to begin with.

But the hope and vulnerability in his eyes when he asked...

How could I say no?

I should have.

A prickling unease burrowed deeper and deeper into my bones as I stood rigid near the doorway of the conference room, half in shadow, listening to voices fracture and overlap.

This was pack business. Alpha business. The kind of thing Kieran had once handled while I waited elsewhere, pretending it didn't hurt every time I was left in the dark.

But now, I wondered if the dark wasn't the best place to be.

Everything about Aaron was off. The sense of decay and poison stung against my senses so much so that I had to pull them back, like holding my breath against a foul stench.

I was content to stay in the background and quietly support Kieran without inserting myself into situations that I had no business being in.

Until Imani burst into the room.

For a heartbeat, I wasn't in Nightfang's stone conference room anymore.

I was back under glittering chandeliers and gold accents at Kieran and Celeste's reunion party, watching a tray shatter across marble while no one moved to help.

I was hearing Laura, the head maid's voice—cold, sharp, cruel: 'You will apologize to our guest, clean this mess up, and then we will discuss appropriate disciplinary action.'

Imani had seemed so much smaller then as she quivered under the head maid's icy stare and the Gamma's looming shadow. She seemed just as fragile now.

The picture I was standing on the edge of was slowly taking shape.

"I...I know you...I think."

"It's me." The desperation in her voice felt like it could split her in two. "Imani. Your mate."

Kieran's frustration strained against the leash he kept around his emotions. "Get her out of here."

I shifted subtly, moving closer to him, bracing for the emotional backlash I could already feel cresting.

This was too much. For Kieran. For Aaron. For Imani. For everyone.

Imani twisted against Gavin's hold and turned toward Kieran, her eyes wild with hope and sorrow in equal measure.

"Please," she begged. "Please, Alpha. Let me stay. Let me be with my mate."

It was at that point that I stepped forward, the thought: 'not my place' dissolving into nothing.

"Imani," I whispered.

She turned, and my chest tightened at the sight of her.

Her hair was loose and wild, dark strands clinging to her tear-soaked cheeks. Her hands curled into Gavin's arms, both a support and a barrier.

Her red-rimmed eyes flicked wildly around the room until they landed on me, and her breath hitched so hard it bordered on a sob.

"Luna—" she started, then stopped herself, horror flashing across her face. "I—I mean—Lady Sera. I'm sorry, I didn't—"

"It's okay," I said quickly, moving closer. "Imani, it's okay. I'm here."

The relief that washed over her face was devastating. She looked like someone adrift for days who had spotted land at last.

She twisted in Gavin's hold, reaching for me. "Please," she begged, voice cracking. "You have to help me. He doesn't understand. He doesn't remember. But he's here. He's really here."

Beside me, I could feel the tension rolling off Kieran in waves, the Alpha in him braced and rigid, already thinking ten steps ahead—to containment, to safety, to what could go wrong.

I placed a hand gently on Imani's arm.

"Gavin," I said softly. "Let her go."

He hesitated, glancing at Kieran.

"Let her go," Kieran reiterated.

Gavin released her.

Imani nearly collapsed forward, and I caught her before she could hit the floor. She clutched at my shoulders, fingers digging in, sobs wracking her small frame.

My throat ached, thick with the strain of holding my emotions back as I guided her to one of the chairs along the wall. I knelt in front of her and positioned myself between her and the man standing silently near the far wall, hollow-eyed and wrong.

"Imani," I said gently. "Where's your son?"

"With my friend," she whispered.

“Okay, good. Can you tell me what happened? Start from the beginning.”

She nodded shakily, wiping at her face with the heel of her hand.

“Six—no, five years ago,” she said, voice trembling. “We’d only just been married when he was called out to the border. Aaron was so proud; he said serving the pack meant everything, that he’d come back stronger, that we’d start our real life then.”

A wet, broken laugh escaped her. “I didn’t even know I was pregnant when he left.”

My heart clenched as an image of her son, whom I’d once babysat, flashed through my mind.

“I found out a month later,” she went on. “I was so excited, but I didn’t send word because I wanted to tell him in person. Then I felt the bond shatter.” She swallowed hard. “Soon after, the news came. They said there was nothing left to bring home.”

Her eyes lifted to mine, shining with old pain. The room felt unbearably quiet, as if no one dared breathe.

“I raised our son alone,” she continued. “Worked double shifts to keep us afloat. People said I was young enough to try again. That I should remarry. I couldn’t. Not when part of me died with him.”

Her shoulders caved, head bowing under a silent, crushing grief.

"And then recently, I felt it again. Just a flicker—so faint I thought I was imagining it. I told myself it was nothing, that grief is unpredictable." She let out a shaky breath. "But tonight, it was real. Strong. Pulling me forward like a thread. I followed it. I didn't even know where I was going. I just—"

She looked past me then, toward Aaron, and I moved, blocking her view. "Eyes on me, Imani," I said softly.

"I know he's confused," she said, her gaze shifting to mine. "I know something's wrong. But I don't care. He's my mate, and the goddess brought him back to me. He can meet his son. He can..." Her words dissolved into a sob.

I turned, catching Kieran's gaze across the room. Compassion shone in his eyes, dulled and heavy with confusion, warring with caution.

He shook his head, a minute action, but the message passed all the same.

I turned back to Imani, softening my voice. "How about this—we get you settled somewhere safe where you can rest. Tomorrow, we'll revisit this."

She shook her head, sniffing. "I just want to be with my mate."

I nodded. "I know. And you will be, once we figure out what's going on."

She searched my face desperately. “You promise?”

“I promise,” I said. And meant it.

How I was going to fulfil it was still to be determined.

After some coaxing—and more tears—I led Imani down the quiet hallway to the room Maya had used when she was here.

She moved like someone in a dream, clinging to my hand the entire way.

Once inside, I helped her into bed. She shook violently now, her adrenaline crashing.

I sat beside her and reached outward, carefully, gently, letting my psychic presence unfurl just enough to soothe, not invade.

A warm hush settled over the room, like a lullaby without sound.

“You’re safe,” I murmured. “Your son is safe. Your mate is safe. Everything will be fine.”

“Thank you,” she whispered sleepily. “You were always so kind to me. Back then and now.”

My chest ached as her eyes closed and her breathing evened out.

When I returned to the conference room, the air felt colder.

Aaron hadn't moved from his position at the corner of the room, hands at his sides, posture loose in a way that wasn't relaxed so much as...uninhabited.

He looked up as I entered, and when his hollow gaze met mine, a slick of unease crawled beneath my skin.

I'd felt this same emptiness once before—deep in the forest on the night of my Shift, staring into the empty eyes of a rogue whose mind had been scraped raw.

This was subtler. Cleaner. More...specific.

But no less terrifying.

'Alina,' I reached inward. 'Are you feeling this too?'

'Yes,' she answered immediately. 'It's not absence. It's removal.'

I inhaled and let my consciousness drift forward.

I didn't expect it to be easy. I braced for the mental blocks I'd experienced every time I'd tried this.

But it was like applying force to break down a door, only for it to simply fall off its hinges.

The instant I stumbled through the threshold of Aaron's mindscape, cold rushed in.

His mind wasn't just blank. It was empty—emptied.

Corridors ended abruptly. Rooms were sealed shut. Memories had been carved away with brutal precision, leaving echoes without substance.

And at the center of it all—something torn out.

Not dead.

Missing.

I pulled back with a gasp, heart pounding.

Kieran was at my side immediately. "Sera?"

I met gaze, dread pooling like ice in my veins.

"He's alive," I said softly. "But part of his soul is gone."

The room went very still.

"And it was done on purpose," I added.