

My Sister 426

Chapter 426 COINCIDENCE

SERAPHINA'S POV

Across the courtyard, the man froze.

I saw him hesitate, and then, with a sharp movement, he turned.

The moment his eyes met mine, recognition flared.

“Sera?” Maxwell gasped, disbelief threading through his voice as he stepped fully into the light. “What are you—”

His gaze flicked to Kieran. Then back to me.

Then, just as quickly, his jaw set and his eyes hardened.

“Not here,” he said under his breath.

I didn't argue.

The courtyard suddenly felt smaller. Tighter. Like every shadow had grown ears.

Kieran's hand slipped into mine, and together we moved toward Maxwell's door instead of ours.

He stepped back to let us in, closing it behind us with a quiet click that sounded as loud as a gunshot.

The room was simple and sparse. A bed, a narrow table, a chair positioned beneath a small window.

"What are you doing here?" Maxwell asked, keeping his voice low.

I crossed my arms, studying him carefully. "We could ask you the same thing."

A flicker of something—hesitation?—crossed his face. Then he exhaled, running a hand through his hair.

"I'm here because of Willow."

I frowned. "Your ex-wife?"

He nodded.

“What about her?”

“She’s working a case,” he said. “Her research team flagged a pattern—disappearances that didn’t make sense. No bodies. No traces. Just...gone.”

A chill slid down my spine.

He stepped closer to the table, bracing his hands against it as if grounding himself.

“At first, it looked like scattered incidents. Different regions. Different profiles. No clear connection.” His jaw tightened. “Until they started lining up the timelines.”

“And?” I pressed.

“And every trail led here,” he said quietly.

“This place?” I asked, glancing toward the door as if I could see through it to the courtyard beyond.

“This place,” Maxwell confirmed. “Or more specifically—who runs it.”

My pulse picked up.

“The mysterious owner,” I said.

Maxwell nodded. “Mysterious is an understatement. No one knows his identity. Doesn’t show his face. Doesn’t deal with people directly.” His mouth twisted. “But recently, word’s been spreading.”

“What kind of word?” Kieran asked.

Maxwe hesitated for a beat before continuing.

“He can reunite people,” he said. “With the ones they’ve lost.”

The chill spread to my veins, and goosebumps prickled my skin.

“By ‘lost’, you mean...”

“I mean, there have been rumors of people reuniting with loved ones they’d buried.”

Kieran swore under his breath.

I ran a hand through my hair, massaging my scalp to stave off the forming headache.

“What have you found out?” I asked Maxwell.

“Not much yet,” he said. “We’re still in the recon phase.”

“We—” I paused. “Willow’s here?”

He nodded. “Not inside the inn. Too risky. She and her team are working from the perimeter. Tracking movement. Watching who comes and goes.” His voice dropped. “Trying to figure out where the missing people are being funneled.”

“Missing people?”

He nodded. “Those who get reunited usually...disappear shortly after the reunion.”

“Of course they do,” I sighed.

Maxwell's eyes narrowed as he looked between Kieran and me.

"Your reactions are..." He straightened. "Do you two know anything about this?"

The problem hit too close to home to be a coincidence.

Kieran and I exchanged a tense, searching look, uncertain how much to reveal.

We came to the same silent conclusion: Maxwell was Maya's brother, which earned him enough credibility.

"The answer is...not so simple," I said.

"This isn't just trafficking," Kieran began.

Maxwell's eyes met his.

"No," he agreed. "I suspected it wasn't."

I exhaled slowly, forcing my thoughts into order.

“We think it’s connected to what we’re chasing,” I said.

“And what’s that?” Maxwell asked.

Surprisingly, it didn’t take that long to give Maxwell the rundown of the Marcus and Catherine problem and how we suspected it was related to their investigation.

Maxwell was silent for a moment, ingesting all we had said.

Then he said, “As unsettling as all that is, it’s definitely not a coincidence. Willow suspected something bigger, but until now, we didn’t have names.”

“Now you do,” Kieran said.

Maxwell’s jaw tightened. “And you’re sure?”

“As sure as we can be without walking into their operation directly,” I replied.

Which, if this place was what we thought it was...

We were already closer than we'd ever been.

I crossed my arms again and began pacing, each step echoing my urgent need to process everything.

"So they're using the dead loved ones as bait," I said, thinking out loud. "And I bet they don't just reunite anyone. They probably vet them, filter who'll be useful before they recruit them and use them for gods know what."

Kieran sighed. "This is much bigger than we thought."

"Much worse," I muttered.

Maxwell straightened, his tone shifting to something more practical. "Okay, silver lining—this is serendipitous. We have the same goal, and we can work together. Get to the owner. Find out what he's really offering."

"And how he's connected to Marcus and Catherine," Kieran added.

"But it's easier said than done," Maxwell said. "This place doesn't just hand out access."

“Well, we’ve already been vetted,” I said. “They put us in the courtyard. Said we have to wait to be selected. Maybe we’ll get lucky.”

Maxwell hesitated.

I frowned. “What?”

“They’re not just selecting people,” he said. “They’re making them compete.”

“Compete how?”

Maxwell’s gaze darted toward the door, as if he could hear something beyond it.

“Money. Influence. Information. Whatever the buyer has to offer.” His voice dropped. “They call it an auction.”

“They’re turning desperation into leverage,” I said.

Maxwell nodded. “Exactly.”

Kieran's jaw tightened.

"And the prize?" he asked.

"A meeting," Maxwell said. "With the owner. From there—"

A knock at the door cut him off.

All three of us stilled.

The knock resounded, and we unfroze.

Maxwell moved first, tension coiling beneath the surface as he stepped toward the door.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Message for all guests," a flat voice replied from the other side.

Maxwell opened the door just enough to receive a folded slip of paper before closing it again.

He didn't speak as he unfolded it, but his expression tightened as soon as he read what was on it.

"What?" I asked.

He looked up.

"The auction is tonight."