

My Sister 321

Chapter 321 LOVE ADVICE

SERAPHINA'S POV

I froze in the doorway, hands raised instinctively, pulse thundering in my ears.

Layered beneath the smell of antiseptic and healing salves was the unmistakable tang of copper. My stomach churned.

"I said get the fuck out, Ethan!" Maya's voice cracked on the last word, raw and furious and wounded all at once.

That's when I found my voice. "Maya, it's me."

Silence.

Then a sharp, disbelieving inhale.

"Sera?"

I stepped further into the room. Her eyes—wild and red-rimmed—snapped to my face. Immediately, the anger drained out of her expression, replaced by horror.

“Oh gods—” She lurched forward, wincing as the movement pulled at her injury. “I thought you were Ethan. I didn’t mean to—are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” I said quickly, crossing the room in two strides.

Her shoulders sagged in visible relief. “I’m so sorry.”

I stopped short in front of her bed.

“No,” I said hoarsely. “You don’t get to apologize. That’s on me.”

Her brows knit together. “Sera—”

“I hurt you.” The words spilled out like a fountain now that they’d been let loose. “I don’t care that everyone keeps saying it wasn’t my fault. I don’t care about instincts or whatever explanation makes it easier to swallow. I did this.” My hand hovered uselessly near the bandages wrapped around her shoulder. “You’re my best friend—one of the best people in my life, and I almost killed you.”

Maya’s expression softened. She reached out with her uninjured hand and caught my wrist, fingers warm and firm.

"Hey," she murmured. "There was never a single second when I blamed you. Not even when I couldn't breathe. Not even when it burned like hell. Not even when Ethan was losing his mind."

My throat tightened. "But—"

"Sera," she repeated, more firmly. "You're right. I'm your best friend, and you're mine. I know you. I know your heart. I know you would sooner carve off a limb than knowingly hurt me—just like I would for you."

Tears blurred my vision, and the knot of guilt loosened enough to let me breathe again.

"And Ethan?" I asked carefully. "You don't resent him?"

Her jaw tightened, but not in anger. Something like regret flashed across her face.

"He's the love of my life, and he saved that life." She exhaled and leaned back against the pillows, eyes drifting to the ceiling. "How can I resent him?"

I gingerly perched on the end of her bed and took her uninjured hand in mine.

“The shattered vase by the wall would say otherwise,” I said softly.

She sighed. “I resent the timing. And how it happened.”

Another bout of guilt rose, but I stayed quiet, letting her find the words in her own time.

“I always pictured it differently,” Maya continued. “Not...fear and blood and panic. I wanted it to be deliberate. Chosen. I wanted romance, damn it.” A humorless laugh escaped her. “I’ve already seen the ring, you know.”

My brows shot up. “You have?”

“Oh yeah,” she said dryly. “He thought he could catch me off guard. Like I didn’t catch him constantly checking his pocket like it contained a live grenade. Or rehearsing lines under his breath in the bathroom at 3 a.m.”

Despite everything, a smile tugged at my mouth.

“I was ready,” she said quietly, her earlier anger gone, replaced by wistfulness. “Mentally. Emotionally. I was going to say yes. And then this happened.” She tugged the collar of her shirt aside, exposing the dark red marks blooming at the juncture of her neck and shoulder.

"It felt like...like my autonomy slipped through my fingers. It felt like something sacred had been rushed. Taken. Even if I would've given it willingly."

"Oh Maya," I whispered.

She pulled her shirt back up and turned her head toward me, eyes sharp and vulnerable in equal measure. "I'm scared, Sera."

My breath hitched. I didn't think those were words I would ever hear from someone as fierce and sure as Maya Cartridge.

"I don't pretend I don't want a mate," she continued. "I do. I always have. I just...don't trust it the way other people seem to."

I shifted closer, careful not to jostle her. "Why?"

Her gaze drifted away again, settling somewhere far in the past.

"My family looks perfect now," she said. "You've met them. Loving parents. Warm house. Sunday dinners. But there was a time when it wasn't like that."

I held my breath.

“When I was in high school,” she went on, voice low, “I came home early one day because I forgot my notes for a test.” She swallowed. “I heard my dad in the bedroom. With another woman.”

My stomach dropped.

“I didn’t see them,” Maya said. “But I heard...enough. I ran away. Missed the stupid test altogether. I spent the next couple of days reeling, trying to decide whether to confront him or just tell my mom outright.”

Her fingers twisted in the sheet.

“But then I’d see my mom,” she whispered. “The way she looked at him, as if the world made sense because he was in it, and I couldn’t break her heart.”

A wave of empathy swallowed me. For all the love I thought they never showed me, my parents adored each other, and I know it would have shattered my mother’s heart if she’d found out my father was unfaithful.

“I told myself that if it ever happened again, I’d say something,” Maya said. “But it never did—at least, not that I saw. My parents stayed together; they stayed happy. And I carried that secret alone.”

“Oh, Maya.” I squeezed her hand. “I’m so sorry.”

She shrugged her uninjured shoulder. “You don’t come out of that unmarked.”

I nodded slowly.

“I tried dating,” Maya continued, “but all my relationships were short. Turns out most men don’t like being with someone who’s stronger than they are. Or smarter. Or hard to control.”

Her lips curved wryly. “Shocking, I know.”

I huffed softly.

“And then there was Maxwell,” she said, voice softening. “Watching him and Willow gave me hope. They were fated. Real. I thought—if they can do it, maybe mate bonds really are stronger than everything else.”

Her eyes dimmed, shadowed in thought.

“But love doesn’t fix neglect,” she said quietly. “And it doesn’t make you immune to disappointment. They loved each other too much to let it rot into resentment, so Willow left before it destroyed them.”

I remembered Maxwell's story, the sadness lurking behind his eyes as he told it.

"That was when I decided not to rush," Maya said. "Not marriage. Not mating. Not until I met someone with whom I didn't have any doubts."

Her gaze shifted to mine, and she smiled.

"And then Ethan happened," she said. "And gods help me, he checked almost every box."

I smiled faintly at that.

"His ego isn't bruised by my strength. His wit matches mine. He's never once tried to control me. He never walks away, even when we fight. He gives space, sure—but never silence. Never abandonment. I feel...cherished by him. And that terrifies me."

"Because you don't want him to fail you," I murmured.

She nodded. "Exactly. And I don't want to fail him, either. You have no idea how relieved I was growing up knowing I would never have to take over as Beta. And then I find out that it's my destiny to be Luna? What if I suck at it? What if that's the one thing I'm not good at?"

She closed her eyes and sighed. "If we don't work out, if I ever lose Ethan...it would kill me."

For a moment, we sat there together in the quiet, two women carrying different scars shaped by the same fear.

I reached out and squeezed Maya's hand gently. "I'm the last person to give you love advice."

She snorted.

I rolled my eyes good-naturedly as I continued. "But if I've learnt anything from the wild variety of case studies I've encountered, it's that love isn't about never being afraid; it's about facing those fears and finding the courage to fight for your happiness anyway. Love makes you vulnerable, but it also gives you something worth fighting for."

She gave me a soft smile. "Pretty solid advice."

I mirrored her smile. "Besides, your fears are pretty stupid. You? Suck at being Luna?" I shook my head. "You're going to be the most badass Luna in Frostbane history."

She laughed. "Compliment me more. It'll help me heal faster."

I was about to do just that, but something outside the window caught my eye.

Color.

I turned my head, and my breath caught.

Mini hot air balloons were rising into the sky beyond the treeline, their envelopes blooming open like flowers against the evening light.

Reds and golds and deep blues drifted upward, flames flaring softly within their baskets. They aligned perfectly, and glowing letters within spelled: MARRY ME

Maya followed my gaze, and her eyes widened.

“That idiot,” she whispered.

A laugh bubbled up through my chest, and I patted her arm gently. “Looks like he managed to catch you off guard after all.”

Her eyes shimmered, tears gathering but not falling.

“Guess I should stop throwing vases,” she muttered.

I smiled, warmth spreading through me despite everything.

Love was terrifying.

But, if you let it, it could lift you off the ground.