

My Sister 402

Chapter 402 TRADITIONAL SUPPORT STRUCTURES

SERAPHINA'S POV

Ava stepped out from behind Alois, small fingers curling into the fabric of his coat as if she needed the contact to stay anchored.

She looked thinner than I remembered, the softness of childhood sharpened into something more fragile and watchful.

She gave a tiny wave. "Hi."

"You're..." My voice faltered. I swallowed, stepping forward slowly, as if sudden movement might frighten her away. "You're okay."

Ava gave a small nod. "I'm okay."

But something in her tone told me that wasn't entirely true.

I crouched in front of her. "Can I hug you?"

She hesitated for a second.

Then she threw her arms around my neck. I pulled her close, one hand cradling the back of her head as if I could shield her from everything she'd endured.

"I was so worried when I heard about the fire," I murmured.

"I'm fine," she whispered, her grip tightening.

When Ava pulled back, I kept my hands on her shoulders, searching her face. "What about your grandmother?"

Her face instantly shuttered, and her head dropped.

"The fire in Moonlight Alley did not take them," Alois said. "Ava and her grandmother survived the initial incident."

Relief surged before something in his tone pulled it short.

"But?" I asked quietly.

Alois inclined his head. "Her grandmother's health had been declining prior to the fire. The conditions that followed accelerated the inevitable."

My grip on Ava's shoulders tightened.

"She passed," he finished.

I looked down at Ava. Her gaze was still trained on the floor, lashes casting faint shadows against her cheeks. There were no tears.

That almost made it worse.

"I'm so sorry," I said softly.

She shrugged one shoulder, a small, dismissive motion that didn't match the weight of what she'd lost.

"It's okay," she said. "She was tired."

My chest ached.

Alois continued, his voice measured, “After her grandmother’s passing, Ava...withdrew. She has not responded well to traditional support structures.”

A delicate way of saying she’d shut down.

“She trusts you,” he added. “More than anyone else I’ve ever known her to interact with. I believed bringing her here might help.”

I didn’t hesitate.

“She can stay.”

Ava glanced up at me at that, something flickering in her eyes—surprise, maybe. Or relief she didn’t quite know how to show.

“You’re safe here,” I told her gently. “You can stay as long as you want. As long as you need.”

Her lips pressed together, uncertainty shadowing her eyes as she gave a shallow nod.

“Okay.”

I stood slowly, my hand slipping into hers. She didn't pull away.

"I'll take care of her," I told Alois.

He gave a small nod, as if that was the answer he'd expected.

Beside me, Kieran's hand brushed against my back—a silent acknowledgment, steady and supportive.

"Let's get you settled," I said to Ava, squeezing her hand.

She followed me without resistance.

The guest room I chose was one of the quieter ones, tucked away from the main flow of the packhouse. Soft light filtered through the curtains, the space warm without being overwhelming.

Ava stepped inside and paused, her gaze moving slowly over the room as if she were cataloguing it.

"You can stay here," I said. "I have some things to take care of, but I'll be back soon. If you need anything, you can come find me. Or Kieran. Or anyone. You're not alone here."

She nodded, but didn't move further in.

I crouched again, gentler this time. "Hey."

Her eyes lifted to mine.

"You don't have to pretend you're okay," I said softly. "Not here."

For a second, I thought she might say something.

Instead, she wrapped her arms around me again.

This time, she didn't let go right away.

I held her, one hand smoothing slowly over her back.

"I've got you," I murmured.

When she finally pulled away, she moved toward the bed and sat down, hands folding neatly in her lap.

I lingered for a moment longer, making sure she was settled before rising.

“I’ll have someone bring you breakfast,” I told her.

She nodded again.

As I turned to leave, her small voice stopped me.

“Sera?”

I turned.

She had curled up on the bed into a tiny ball. “Thank you.”

I smiled. “Anytime.”

I rejoined Kieran and Alois, and we moved toward Aaron's quarters in silence, the tension building with every step.

The guards stationed outside straightened as we approached and immediately stepped aside.

Inside, Aaron sat on the edge of the bed, hands resting loosely on his thighs, posture slack in a way that wasn't relaxed so much as...disengaged.

Imani sat nearby, angled toward him, her body tilted forward as if unconsciously reaching for him but not daring to close the distance.

Their son was tucked against her side, one hand clutching her sleeve, wide eyes fixed on the man who was supposed to be his father.

The moment we stepped in, Imani looked up. Relief flooded her face when she saw me.

"Lady Sera," she gasped, rising to her feet.

I gave her a gentle smile. "How are you holding up?"

Her lips parted, eyes shimmering with uncertainty, searching for words that refused to come.

“I...” She glanced back at Aaron, her expression wavering. “I’m trying.”

A brief thought occurred to me that Ava wasn’t the only one not responding to traditional support structures.

My gaze softened as it dropped to her son. “And him?”

“He hasn’t left my side,” she said, her hand coming down to rest on the boy’s head. “I didn’t want to keep him away any longer. I thought...maybe seeing him might help.”

The squashed hope in that sentence pressed painfully against my chest.

“You’re doing the right thing,” I assured her. “Being here with him. Both of you.”

Her eyes glistened, gratitude flickering through the grief. “Thank you...for letting us stay. For everything.”

I shook my head. “You don’t have to thank me.”

Kieran stepped forward and called out gently. “Aaron?”

Aaron lifted his head.

“Alpha.”

Imani flinched at the sound, her shoulders tightening, but she steadied herself quickly, drawing in a quiet breath.

Alois studied Aaron for a moment before moving closer.

“May I?” he asked.

Kieran gave a short nod. “Go ahead.”

Imani hesitated, glancing between us, then at Aaron and Alois, understanding slowly dawning.

“This is...to help him?” she asked, fragile but steady.

“Yes,” I assured her.

She nodded, swallowing hard, and looked down at her son.

“Come on,” she murmured, brushing a hand over his hair. “Let’s give them some space.”

The boy resisted for a second, his gaze still fixed on Aaron, but eventually allowed himself to be guided.

As she passed me, her fingers brushed mine lightly—an unconscious gesture, seeking reassurance.

“He’s going to be okay, right?” she whispered.

“We’re going to do everything we can,” I said softly.

She held my gaze for a moment longer, then gave a small, trembling nod before leading her son out of the room.

The door clicked shut behind them.

Alois moved with precise calm, crouching in front of Aaron, his gaze intent.

Aaron didn’t react to Alois, didn’t flinch, didn’t even track the movement.

Alois' hand lifted, hovering just within reach, and I felt a faint, controlled pressure brushing against the edges of my awareness.

Psychic energy, but unlike anything I was used to wielding.

Where mine surged and strained against resistance, his moved with quiet precision, threading inward rather than forcing its way through, slipping into the spaces Aaron couldn't guard.

Aaron remained still, his expression unchanged, but something shifted beneath the surface, something I could feel more than see.

A flicker of confusion crossed his face then, brief and unanchored, like a reaction without understanding. It faded just as quickly as it appeared.

There was no awareness behind it, no recognition of intrusion—only a momentary disturbance that didn't know what it was responding to.

Alois stilled, not physically but in focus, as if something he had been tracing had reached its end, or its limit.

The silence stretched, heavy and expectant, no one daring to interrupt, because whatever he was confirming in that moment mattered more than any question we could ask.

When Alois finally withdrew, the pressure eased with him, the subtle psychic tension receding until the room felt like itself again.

He straightened slowly, composure intact, but there was a seriousness in his expression now that hadn't been there before.

"Well?" Kieran pressed, the restraint he'd been holding onto thinning. "What did you see?"

Alois's gaze lingered on Aaron for a moment longer, something thoughtful and distant passing behind his composure, before he looked back at us.

"We should discuss this elsewhere. Gather everyone."