

My Sister 444

Chapter 444 SIMPLE WARM COMFORT

SERAPHINA'S POV

Daniel sat a few feet away, half veiled in shadow, half revealed by the pale spill of moonlight. His shoulders were hunched, hands shoved awkwardly into the pockets of his pajama pants.

Of all the people I expected to find on the roof at nearly one in the morning, my ten-year-old son was very much not on that list.

“What are you doing up here?” I asked, my voice softer than the surprise that had sparked it.

Daniel winced, and I caught a flicker of embarrassment as his gaze slid away from mine.

“I, uh...” He rubbed the back of his neck. “I couldn’t sleep.”

I raised a brow.

He immediately grimaced.

“Okay, that’s not true,” he admitted, glancing at me with anxious expectation, like he was bracing to be scolded. “I just...had to come up here.”

“Had to?” I echoed, moving closer to him.

I sat next to him and mirrored his position, hugging my knees.

“Care to elaborate?” I asked.

He shook his head, a lock of hair flopping over his eyes.

My other brow joined the first. “Daniel Blackthorne, since when do you keep things from your mother?”

He groaned softly, dragging a hand down his face.

“It was just a stupid bet.”

“A bet,” I repeated slowly.

“With Ava,” he added with an aggrieved sigh.

I bit my lower lip, stifling the smile threatening to break free.

"I...see," I said carefully. "And what was this bet about?"

He huffed. "It's stupid. She's stupid."

I pressed my teeth harder into my lip, waiting for him to go on.

After a moment of sullen silence, Daniel exhaled, his shoulders sagging further as he gave in.

"She bet I couldn't stay up on the roof all night cause I'm scared of the dark."

I frowned. "But you're not scared of the dark."

"I know!" He threw his hands up in exasperation. "But I have to prove it, or she'll call me a coward."

I let out an amused breath, shaking my head as I leaned back, legs stretched out before me.

“So this,” I said, glancing around at the wide, quiet rooftop, “is your grand plan to defend your honor?”

He shot me a look, narrowing his eyes. “You’re not taking this seriously.”

“Oh, I am,” I said, straight-faced despite my twitching lips. “Your reputation is clearly on the line. Critical situation.”

“Mom.”

“Yes, baby?”

“Are you making fun of me?”

“Just a little.”

He groaned and flopped back onto the cool surface of the rooftop, one arm thrown over his face dramatically.

“I knew I shouldn’t have come up here.”

“Ah, but then you would have missed this lovely bonding moment,” I teased.

He peeked at me from under his arm, eyes narrowed, and lips pursed in a stubborn, unimpressed scowl.
“Pass.”

I laughed, the sound slipping out more easily than I expected.

The tension in my chest loosened, softened by Daniel’s presence.

“You know,” I said after a moment, my voice soft, “you don’t actually have to prove anything to Ava—or anyone else.”

He scoffed, dropping his arm to look at me. “That’s easy for you to say. You adore me.”

I snorted, ruffling his hair.

“That’s true,” I agreed. “But so is what I said.”

He turned his head and stared at the sky, quiet for a beat.

“She’s annoying,” he muttered.

“Yeah? Tell me about it.”

Daniel let out a long-suffering sigh, as if he’d waited his whole life for this moment.

“She’s so stubborn,” he said, pushing himself up onto his elbows. “Like, you tell her one thing, and she’ll argue the exact opposite just because.”

“Mm,” I hummed, nodding thoughtfully. “That does sound exhausting.”

“It is,” he insisted. “And she never listens. Ever. Even when she’s wrong—which is a lot, by the way—she’ll just double down.”

“Annoying,” I murmured, resting my chin on my knee.

“And she’s bossy,” he continued, riled up now. “Always telling people what to do. ‘Daniel, fix your stance.’ ‘Daniel, you’re leaning too far forward.’ ‘Daniel, that’s not how you hold a blade.’ Like I’m not the one who has spent months training.”

“Ugh, frustrating.”

If I bit my lip any harder, I'd draw blood.

"She acts like she knows everything," he went on. "Which is so annoying because she knows literally nothing!"

"Of course not."

"And she's always watching," he added, voice dropping. "Always. You mess up once. She notices immediately."

"Oh?" I tilted my head. "Sounds like she pays a lot of attention to you."

"She pays attention to everyone," he said quickly.

"Hmm."

"And she's—" He stopped abruptly, frowning as if he'd run out of acceptable complaints.

"She's just..." He gestured vaguely, clearly frustrated. "A lot."

“A lot,” I echoed.

“Yeah.”

“Stubborn. Bossy. Always watching. Pays close attention,” I listed off calmly.

He shot me a suspicious look.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

His eyes narrowed. “Mom?”

I blinked at him, eyes wide and innocent. “I didn’t say anything.”

“You don’t look offended on my behalf.”

I laughed, shaking my head.

“Well,” I said, nudging his foot with mine, “for someone so annoying, you seem to think about her quite a bit.”

“I do not,” he said immediately.

“You just spent the last five minutes listing her personality traits in great detail.”

“That’s because she’s annoying,” he repeated stubbornly.

“Of course.”

He huffed, flopping back down again and glaring up at the sky as if it had wronged him.

For a moment, I let him stew in his own thoughts before speaking again.

“So,” I said casually, “do you want me to do something about it?”

He stilled. “What do you mean?”

I shrugged, keeping my tone easy. "If Ava bothers you that much, I could have her reassigned to a different training group."

He bolted upright. "No!"

My eyebrows shot up.

Daniel seemed to realize what he'd just done a second too late.

"I mean—" He stumbled over his words, his expression shifting rapidly from defensive to flustered. "Not like that—I just—she's not that bad, and it's not—like, I don't need—"

His ears turned red, and I bit back a squeal.

"I can handle it," he said quickly, like he was trying to recover ground that had already been lost. "It's just...training stuff. And Dad asked me to look after her; I don't want to disappoint him."

"You could never disappoint me."

Daniel and I turned simultaneously.

Kieran stood near the entrance, one shoulder resting against the doorframe, arms crossed loosely over his chest.

“Oh, thank God,” Daniel muttered under his breath, obviously grateful for the interruption.

I pretended I didn’t hear him and smiled at Kieran. “Hi.”

He pushed off the doorframe and walked over, his steps unhurried.

“I was wondering where you disappeared to,” he said. “Gavin said he saw a shadow sneaking through the hallway. I assumed it wasn’t a particularly ambitious intruder.”

I chuckled. “I didn’t want to bother you.”

Kieran’s gaze lingered on me for a moment, something soft and knowing passing through his eyes. “You could never bother me.”

The velvety tips of butterfly wings fluttered in my stomach.

“Mind if I join you?” he asked.

I tilted my head toward the open space, and Daniel shifted, making room.

Kieran lowered himself next to our son with a quiet exhale, stretching his legs out in front of him and bracing one arm behind him for support.

For a moment, the three of us simply...sat.

The night wrapped around us, cool and still, the sky stretching endlessly above.

“So,” Kieran said after a beat, glancing at Daniel again, “Ava, huh?”

Daniel stiffened.

“She said I wasn’t brave,” he mumbled.

“And you decided the best way to disprove that was to sit alone on a dark rooftop all night.”

“...yeah.”

Kieran nodded slowly. "I see the logic."

Daniel blinked, clearly not expecting agreement.

"You do?"

"No," Kieran snorted. "But I respect the commitment."

I laughed, unable to help it.

Daniel looked between us, a pout on his lips. "If I knew this is what you two getting back together was like, I wouldn't have wished so hard for it."

I let out a surprised laugh. "Daniel!"

He rolled his eyes, a smile stretching the pout. "Kidding."

His shoulders had relaxed, the earlier defensiveness replaced with something lighter.

Kieran's gaze softened as he gently nudged Daniel's shoulder.

“You know,” he said, “bravery isn’t really about proving something to someone else.”

Daniel sighed. “I know.”

I nudged him too. “But you can’t let Ava win.”

“Exactly!” he said, seizing onto that.

Kieran huffed a quiet laugh.

“And for the record,” he added, a faint hint of amusement in his voice, “anyone who’s seen you train knows you’re not lacking in that department.”

A flicker of something—pride, relief, maybe both—crossed Daniel’s face.

“I’ve been watching you,” Kieran added. “You’ve been doing very well.”

Daniel’s eyes widened. “You have?”

“Of course.”

Daniel straightened, chest lifting slightly, and his chin coming up with shy pride.

“Oh. I thought you were too busy.”

“I have been busy,” Kieran admitted.

He reached out then, resting a hand on the back of Daniel’s head, ruffling his hair.

“But I’ll never be too busy for you.”

I reached out and squeezed Daniel’s knee. “We’ll always be here for you, honey, no matter what. Never forget that.”

Daniel gave me a soft smile, his hand resting over mine. “I won’t.”

I wrapped an arm around him and pulled him closer.

He didn't protest. Didn't even bother pretending to be more grown than he was.

"I'm not tired," he murmured, resting his head against my shoulder.

"Of course not," I said softly, stroking his hair.

Kieran snorted, a faint smile tugging at his lips.

"Seriously," Daniel mumbled. "I'm supposed to..."

His breathing evened out, and just like that, he was asleep.

My hold tightened, careful and protective as I shifted him more comfortably against me, one hand still brushing lightly through his hair.

Kieran shifted closer and reached out, his long arm wrapping around Daniel and me.

"I wish we could stay in this moment forever," he said softly, his voice low enough not to disturb Daniel.

I leaned into him, the steady warmth of his presence grounding in a way that went deeper than words.

“Me too,” I murmured.

And for the first time in what felt like forever, everything—dreams, threats, uncertainty—fell quiet.

Held at bay by the simple, warm comfort of my family.