

My Sister 77

Chapter 77 HEART-TO-HEART

SERAPHINA'S POV

I was out of Maya's car before it even rolled to a stop.

"Let me know how it goes!" she called out after me.

I think I gave her an answer—I'm not sure. I was too distracted trying to get my encrypted phone out of my bag without tripping on the porch steps.

Leona's voice from earlier still rang in my head. I'd thought she'd called to join the tedious chorus of 'Stay away from Kieran,' but the topic of conversation had been much more devastating.

I could still hear the faint tremor underneath her usual poise.

"I was going to call Kieran first, but Daniel has always had a softer spot for you, and you might have a better chance to get through to him..."

Apparently, Daniel had been "off" lately. Not sullen, exactly, but...different. Guarded. Like he'd put up a wall between himself and the rest of the household.

She said he still smiled, still did his lessons, and made polite conversation—but the light in my baby's eyes had dimmed.

And then the part that hooked itself under my ribs:

“He used to be so open-hearted with us. Now I feel like he's closed himself off. Maybe you could have a heart-to-heart? You're his mother; he might tell you what he won't tell me.”

I'd spent the entire drive home with an invisible hand tightening around my throat.

Now, my fingers hovered over the call button, my heart beating wildly against my sternum. It was stupid, but part of me was...scared.

Daniel was the one bright light in my life. If that light had dimmed...

I pressed the button before I could talk myself out of it.

Daniel answered on the second ring, his voice filled with his usual warmth.

“Hey, Mom!”

Just like that, my tension eased a notch. “Hey, sweetheart. How’s my favorite person in the whole world?”

He beamed. “Good, now that he’s talking to his favorite person in the whole world.”

I leaned back into my seat, relief flooding through me, loosening the rest of the tension.

For a while, we traded easy chatter—what he’d had for lunch (“Grandma made something with quinoa, which I’m pretty sure is a fancy kind of bird food, but it’s okay, because Grandpa snuck me a hot dog later”), how his lessons were going (“Science and English are fine, but I’m pretty sure my tutor has never seen a math equation in his life”), how his surfing lessons were going (“I rode a really high wave last week! I mean, I wiped out after thirty seconds, but it was so cool!”)

If Leona hadn’t said anything, I might have hung up thinking everything was fine. His eyes shone with their familiar sparkle; he sounded happy. He sounded like Daniel. Like my baby.

But I couldn’t unhear her words, and that made me reckless.

So, without thinking, I said, “Leona mentioned you’ve been...quieter lately, more withdrawn. Is something going on?”

The silence that followed was not my son searching for the right words—it was the heavy, frozen kind that settles the moment you realize you’ve stepped on thin ice.

When he finally spoke, his tone was sharp in a way I'd never heard from him before. And his eyes...

My breath hitched as the sparkle winked out, like throwing a blanket over a firefly.

"So that's why you called. Because Grandma said I'm acting weird?"

"No—" I began, but he was already rolling over me.

"You know what's weird? How the adults in my life always decide how I'm feeling without asking me first. You and Grandma and Dad—you just decide. You decided to send me here without asking. Every time I say I want to come home, you promise me 'soon, soon,' but it's already been months." His voice rose, each word tightening like a vise around my heart.

"You already have control over what happens to me. Where I live, who I live with, what I eat. It's never about what I want. Must you control how I feel, too?"

My heart lurched. "Daniel—"

"Who are you to decide if I feel weird? You and Dad aren't happy all the time. Grandma and grandpa aren't happy all the time. Why do I have to be happy all the time?"

It felt like the ice had broken underneath my feet, and I was drowning in freezing water. I'd never heard Daniel talk this way before.

And it wasn't just his tone, not just his frustration—it was the sheer weight of his words. They weren't careless; they'd been stewing inside him for a long time, looking for a way out.

The thought that my nine-year-old had been forced to grow up so much that he had so many complex emotions tore at my heart.

For a few seconds, I didn't know what to say. My brain scrambled to pull up the right "mom" response, but every line felt thin, flimsy against the reality of what I'd just heard.

"I'm so—" I had to stop, to gather myself so that when I spoke again, my voice didn't tremble. "I'm so sorry, my love. I realize that probably doesn't make up for anything but..." I sighed.

"Your dad and your grandparents and I... We all love you so very much. Every single decision we make is for your own good, even though it might not seem that way right now. I'm so sorry you're hurting, sweetheart."

His breathing on the other end slowed, and he closed his eyes. I let the tear I'd been keeping at bay slide down my cheek, and hastily wiped it away before he opened his eyes again.

"I just..." he started, then stopped. When he spoke again, the fight in his voice had dulled, but the frustration still hummed underneath.

"I miss you, Mom. I miss waking up to the smell of your cooking. I miss your hugs and kisses. Your voice doesn't sound the same over the phone. You always say my home is with you, but you're not here." His voice cracked, and my heart cracked along with it. "How am I supposed to be okay when I'm away from my home?"

That was it. The dam in my chest broke.

"Oh, baby." My throat ached, my voice thick. "I'm so sorry. I didn't know you felt like this. I should have asked earlier how you felt about it all. I should have made it easier for you to tell me these things. I hate that I made you feel like you had to hold it in."

"I know you didn't mean to," he murmured.

Still, guilt gnawed at me. My son—my baby—had been carrying this weight while I'd been telling myself he was fine, that he was adapting. That he was safe.

But rogues weren't the only thing capable of hurting him.

"I can't promise that you're coming home soon," I said, gripping the phone tighter.

Not in the aftermath of the fresh rogue attack. I would rather have my insides carved out than have a single slimy claw touch my baby.

“But I can promise that I’ll bring home to you,” I added, reaching a resolution.

Screw Kieran’s reservations about the security risk of me going to the island.

Daniel’s breath audibly hitched. “What does that mean?”

I smiled softly. “It means I’ll see you soon, my baby. And I’ll stuff you to the brim with all your favorite foods and smother you with hugs and kisses.”

His eyes widened, and that spark flickered, like it was trying to come back to life. “You mean it?”

I didn’t know how I was going to convince Kieran, but I knew that nothing could keep me from my baby.

“Yes, my love. I mean it. Just hold on for me a little longer, okay?”

There was a pause, then a soft, hopeful, “Okay.”

“In the meantime, can you do something for me?”

He smiled wryly. “Depends. Is it a math problem?”

That tugged a reluctant smile from me. He was joking around; he would be fine.

“No. Just...don’t shut me out, Danny. Even if you’re angry, even if you think I won’t get it. I’d rather hear it all than feel like you’re hiding pieces of yourself from me.”

He nodded. “I’m sorry, Mom.”

I shook my head. “You have absolutely nothing to be sorry for. I just hate to see you hurting.”

Especially knowing I was the cause.

We lingered on the line for a while after that, talking about all the things we would do when I came—he’d show me how to play the new video game I’d gotten for him, he’d show me the surfing moves he’d learned, we’d have ice cream on the beach, and go sailing.

Slowly, the sharp edges of the earlier strain softened.

By the time we said goodbye, his voice was brighter. Not fixed, not magically healed—but lighter. And for now, I’d take that.

Still, as I sank further into the couch and closed my eyes, my chest ached with the knowledge that my son's smile had been carrying cracks I hadn't seen.

And the weight of my promise—to breach the distance between us, no matter what it took—settled over me like a vow I couldn't afford to break.