

## **My Sister 98**

### Chapter 98 BEST PARTY EVER

#### SERAPHINA'S POV

My first clue about Maya's 'welcome back present' should have been the fancy garment box Lucian presented me with when we stopped at my house to drop off my luggage and freshen up.

Inside was a gorgeous soft cream dress that took my breath away. It was made of flowy chiffon that hugged my waist and swayed around me like water when I moved.

My second clue should have been when Lucian told me to pack an overnight bag.

And yet, I was still blown clean off my feet when I stepped into the lobby of the Hot Springs Hotel.

"SURPRISE!" the OTS members shouted in unison. A burst of laughter followed as confetti rained down, sticking in my hair and glittering against my dress.

I blinked rapidly, overwhelmed, until Maya came rushing toward me in a flowing teal gown that matched her bright spirit and practically glowed against her bronze skin.

"Sera!" She threw her arms around my neck, and a breathless laugh fell out of me as I hugged her tightly.

"I missed you so much," I said, grinning so hard my jaw ached.

She pulled back, cupping my cheeks. "Of course you did! Quite frankly, I have no idea how you survived that long without me by your side."

I laughed. "I could say the same about you."

She rolled her eyes, pulling me behind her into the grand hall.

I looked around, my mouth dropping open slightly. "Maya, this is..."

The entire hall was bathed in soft golden light. Paper lanterns floated above, glowing like captured stars. A long table was set up with food, desserts stacked on polished trays, and bottles of champagne chilling in silver buckets.

Warm steam drifted from the open-air hot springs outside, perfumed with herbs and faint floral oils.

The place wasn't extravagant in the cold, sterile way the previous galas and social gatherings I'd attended had been. This was warm, intimate, thoughtfully designed.

And it was all for me.

“Do you love it?” Maya asked breathlessly, grabbing both my hands.

Her eyes sparkled as though my reaction mattered more than anything else in the world.

“I had the entire thing arranged the moment Ethan told me you were coming back. The hot springs are open all night, we have the entire hotel to ourselves, and I got all your favorite foods and desserts.”

She hopped on her heels like she’d already gotten into the desserts and was having a sugar high. “Tell me you love it!”

I laughed shakily. “Maya... I don’t even have words. Of course I love it; It’s all so beautiful.”

“Not as beautiful as you,” she declared with exaggerated flair, stepping back to admire me.

I felt a blush creep up my cheeks. When I’d first put the dress on, I thought it was too much, too delicate for me.

But now, seeing how it glowed in the golden light, how it made me feel like I belonged in this warmth, I realized that, as always, Maya was right.

"I can't believe you planned all this just for me," I said softly. "I was gone a little over a week, Maya."

"A week, a month, it doesn't matter," she said, cupping my cheeks again. "You deserve it. You spent so much of your life being cast aside and condemned, so now you have a lot of celebrating to do to make up for it."

Something in my chest cracked open. I hugged her tight, burying my face in her shoulder. "Thank you," I whispered, my voice thick with emotion.

"Well,"—she stroked my back lovingly—"I wish I could take all the credit, but it wasn't my Amex that rented out the hotel for the night."

I pulled back slightly, my brow arched.

Maya smirked and nodded behind me.

Lucian was still there, watching our interaction with a fond smile on his face. He looked almost too composed for the setting in his tailored dark suit, but somehow that only made him more endearing.

Of course he was in on it.

My smile wobbled, and I blinked back tears. “Thank you,” I repeated softly.

He slipped to my side, his hand taking mine in a quiet claim of presence. “Always, Sera.”

The tenderness in his eyes made my heart flutter, and it skipped a beat altogether when he drew me in closer.

My eyes widened, darting pointedly to the crowd of OTS members milling about—and Maya, who was in danger of splitting her face in half with her smile.

“Hey,” Lucian said softly, drawing me in even closer. “Don’t worry about them.”

“But...”

It was no secret that Lucian and I were friends, but we’d never been together in this capacity.

I thought about the rumors Maya had told me had circulated after my birthday party, and how we would me more or less affirming them—

“Unless you’re embarrassed to be seen with me?” Lucian added with a teasing smirk.

I laughed softly. "If anything, it's the other way around."

He chuckled and pulled me close enough that our chests were pressed together. "I'm honored to be seen with you," he murmured in my ear. "I want them all to know. Let them talk."

A delicate chime pierced the air, and I turned to see Maya clinking a spoon against her glass, silencing the chatter.

She winked at me before addressing the room.

"Ladies and gentlemen, and everyone in between, I have an announcement," she said dramatically. "Our dear Seraphina has been through storms—most of us can relate because we've been through storms of our own. And she's still here, standing taller than ever, arguably one of our most promising rookies. But that's not all. Tonight, she and Lucian have something they'd like to share."

My eyes widened. "Maya—"

"Don't give me that look," she hissed quietly. "It's time."

Lucian only chuckled, clearly in on the scheme. He turned to me, lifting a brow. "Shall we?"

My pulse skittered. This was more than closeness and letting people speculate.

A part of me still wanted to hide, to keep this fragile new happiness tucked close. But when I met Lucian's gaze—steady, reassuring, utterly mine—I felt courage bloom.

So I nodded.

He wrapped an arm around my waist, pulling me gently but firmly against him. "We're together," he announced, his deep voice carrying easily across the room. "She is mine, as I am hers."

The crowd erupted. Cheers, whistles, applause. Someone shouted, "Finally!" and another, "About time!"

And then, in front of everyone, Lucian bent his head and kissed me.

It wasn't the fierce, demanding kiss of the parking lot earlier. This was sweet, unhurried, tender. His lips brushed mine like a vow, and the room spun with light and laughter around us.

I smiled into it. For once, I didn't care who was watching.

Let them talk.

And they did talk—in the best way.

For the first time in my life, I was the topic of conversation, and it didn't make me want to curl up in a ball under a table and cry.

Maya dragged me from group to group, proudly introducing me like I hadn't already met most of them, insisting that tonight was about me being welcomed properly.

I found myself laughing with fellow rookies who recounted training mishaps, getting technique tips from other trainers, clinking glasses with healers who promised to teach me their herb blends, and joining in conversations about favorite foods, movies, and random OTS gossip.

Everywhere I turned, someone smiled at me. Not mockingly. Not with suspicion. Just...acceptance.

Quite frankly, it was the best party ever.

As the night went on, I sank into the warmth like sinking into a hot spring.

I let myself breathe without the shadow of Kieran or Celeste pressing in. Their voices, their judgments, all the drama of the last week—they felt a thousand miles away.

Lucian never strayed far from me. Sometimes his hand found the small of my back; other times, our shoulders brushed in passing.



Each touch was grounding, reminding me that I wasn't alone anymore. That I was chosen, and not in the twisted, cruel way fate had once forced me into with Kieran.

I caught Maya's eye across the room at one point. She grinned at me, mouthing, 'You're glowing.'

Maybe I was.

I thought of the Lockwood and Blackthorne galas—of polished marble floors and ballrooms where I'd stood at the edges, ignored at best, shunned at worst.

The contrast nearly brought me to tears. Because here, in a rented hot spring hotel filled with music, chatter, and too many desserts, I felt more at home than I ever had in those cold palaces.

I thought of Daniel, too. How he would love the steam rising off the water, how he would splash to his heart's content and laugh and ask for two slices of cake at once.

An ache cleaved between the happiness bubbling up in my chest. I hated that I'd had to leave him so soon, hated how quickly it seemed my life had reset without him in it.

As amazing as my new friends were, as liberating as new love felt, I knew that I could never truly be complete, never truly feel at home without my son.

But it was hard to dwell on the missing piece of me when the other pieces were larger than life and filling me with more delight than guilt.

And maybe that was the real gift of tonight—not forgetting the missing pieces, not pretending the wounds didn't exist, but realizing that love, happiness—in all their forms—was still possible.

That I could be both broken and healing, grieving and glowing.