

## **My Sister 14**

Chapter 14 ALL THESE YEARS

KIERAN'S POV

I watched Sera like a hawk.

Just watched the steady rise and fall of Sera's chest like it held the secrets of the universe.

Even now—with her awake and resting—the image of her bleeding out on that bridge played behind my eyelids every time I closed them. How close I'd come to losing her. Again.

Our hands lay entwined on the hospital blanket. When was the last time we'd touched like this? Not during the divorce. Not during our marriage. Had we ever?

My phone buzzed in my pocket, and I fished it out with my other hand, not wanting to let go of Sera's.

"Margaret." My voice sounded rough even to me. "I was about to call you."

Her voice was shaky with anxiety when she said, "Did something happen? Is she okay? Is she—?"

"She woke up." I cut off the panic before it could spiral. Margaret had been a ghost in these halls since the shooting—another casualty of this nightmare. First Edward, now Sera. The grief hung on her like a second skin.

She'd begged to take my place at Sera's bedside. I'd refused. Not just because Margaret was barely holding herself together, but because the thought of walking away made my wolf snarl.

"Oh, thank the gods," Margaret sobbed, and I heard a shuffle like she'd dropped into a chair. "How is she?"

"On initial examination, the doctor said everything looked good. She just has to rest a lot, and she has a long road of healing ahead of her."

"But she'll live?" Margaret's voice wobbled, thick with tears. "My daughter won't die?"

The thought of Sera dying was like my own silver bullet to the heart.

"No." My thumb brushed Sera's knuckles. "She's not going anywhere."

Margaret let out a heavy sigh of relief. A pause. Then, so quiet I almost missed it: "Do you... Do you think she'd want to see me?"

I ground my teeth. Over the last couple of weeks since the funeral, Sera had made it a point to stay away from her family, not hiding her intention to cut all ties. Even injured and enervated, she'd wanted me to leave. I could only imagine what kind of welcome Margaret would receive.

"I think we should give her some space for now," I said carefully. "Let her fully recover. And you also need to rest, Margaret; you've gone through a lot of heartache in such a short time."

Margaret sniffed. "I understand. Thank you, Kieran. I know you two are divorced, and you don't have to—"

"She's Daniel's mother." The lie came easily. "Divorced or not, she's my responsibility." At least, that's what I had been telling myself.

Just as I hung up the phone with Margaret, Sera's phone on the side table rang.

An unfamiliar name flashed on Sera's screen: Elaine.

I answered warily. "Hello—"

"How's my favorite wordsmith doing?" A woman's cheerful voice cut me off. "You ghosted me for two days! Writer's block? Look, I know divorce sucks, you could be in a mental slump, but you're newly single, girl! Go live a little—your readers need that sequel. That man never deserved you anyway."

I pulled the phone away from me, frowned at the name, and put it back. "Ma'am, I think you have the wrong number."

There was a pause. And then, "Isn't this Sera's phone?"

"Well, yes, but..."

"I'm Elaine, her editor. Could you kindly give the phone to her?"

I was frowning so hard, I probably had a unibrow. "Editor?"

"Yeah, just as I've told you," she snapped. "Who is this?"

"Kieran, her hus—" I caught myself in time. It was one thing to let the hospital staff believe we were still married; it was another to introduce myself that way. "Her ex-husband."

The temperature dropped. "Ah. The divorced ex-husband. Why do you have her phone?"

"Lady, what do you mean by 'editor'?"

A dry laugh. "Oh, this is rich. She said you didn't know."

"Know what?"

"That your ex-wife is a bestselling author? That she's sold half a million books worldwide under a pen name?"

My mouth fell open, and I glanced at Sera sleeping peacefully, unaware of the bomb that had just been dropped on my head.

She was an... author? What the fuck?

I'd vaguely wondered why she never asked for money, but I chalked it up to the fact that she subsisted off the Lockwood family funds and never thought of it twice.

All those hours she'd spent locked in her room...

She hadn't been hiding.

She'd been writing, building a career for herself.

Elaine's voice sharpened. "Now that I've satisfied your curiosity, put Sera on."

"She's... unavailable."

"What does that mean?"

I exhaled. "She's in the hospital. There was an... incident."

Elaine gasped. "Oh, poor Sera! Is she okay? Can I come to see her?"

"She will be." My grip tightened on the phone. "But no visitors yet."

"Take care of her, Kieran." Elaine's tone held a warning.

I looked at the woman who'd been my wife for ten years—the woman I'd never truly known.

I swallowed. "Yeah. I will."

After I hung up, I grabbed my phone and typed out Sera's pen name into my Google search. My jaw dropped at the results.

She went by only Seraphina—neither Blackthorne nor Lockwood—and over the past decade, she'd published more than ten books. A 4.6-star average. A devoted fanbase.

My breath left me in a rush, guilt curdling in my chest. I turned to look at her, sleeping soundly in the hospital bed. How isolated from me had she felt that she'd kept this part of her hidden?

We'd shared a life, a child—and yet, we'd truly been strangers all these years.

The walls of the room suddenly felt too close, the air too thick. I needed to get out.

I pushed off the stool beside her bed, my muscles stiff from days of barely moving. But as I swung the door open, I froze.

Ethan stood there, fist raised to knock, Celeste hovering behind him.

"Hey," Ethan exhaled. "Mom called us and said Sera had woken up."

I nodded, stepping into the hallway and pulling the door shut behind me. "She did. But she's asleep again."

His jaw tightened. "How is she?"

"She's—"

"Kie." Celeste cut in, catching my hand. "How are you?"

"Fine."

"No, you're not." She shouldered past Ethan, her sky-high heels putting her nearly at my eye level. Her fingers framed my face, her blue eyes roaming all over me. "When was the last time you slept?"

I shrugged. "Someone had to watch over Sera."

Her grip tightened. "Not you. You don't owe her anything, Kie."

A tired sigh escaped me. "She's Daniel's mother, Celeste. I won't let my son grow up without his mother."

She huffed. "Look at you." She cupped my cheek, her thumb swiping under my eye. "You're dead on your feet."



Ethan patted me on the shoulder. "You should go home, man. Get some rest; we'll take it from here."

But my feet stayed rooted to the floor, an instinctive resistance flaring in my chest. Sera and her siblings had never been close—and after everything, I couldn't shake the need to shield her from the family that had failed her so badly.

Hypocrite, a bitter voice hissed in my head. You hurt her worse than any of them. She hadn't even trusted me enough to share her writing.

"Kieran." Celeste drew my attention back to her. "Go home, please. We'll take care of Sera."

The weight of exhaustion pressed down on me, undeniable now. "...Yeah. Okay."

I turned to Ethan. "Don't leave her alone. We still don't know if the threat's passed."

He gave a grim nod.

Celeste tilted my chin back to her. "Stop worrying. Go."

This time, I nodded.

It happened in a heartbeat—Celeste smiled, her eyes trained on my lips, but just before she could make contact, I shifted, and her lips pressed against my jaw instead.

I forced a smile, trying to cover up my uneasiness and surprise at what I'd just done. Brief confusion and hurt flashed in Celeste's eyes, but she covered it up and stepped back, her hands falling from my face.

"Go on, now," she murmured, too soft, too careful.

I nodded and forced my legs to move away from Sera's door.

The phantom warmth of Celeste's lips still burned against my skin, and I couldn't explain why I'd moved. Why I'd avoided it.

Celeste and I had been affectionate since she returned—teasing touches, lingering hugs—but we hadn't kissed. Not once. And now, striding through the parking lot, I realized that it hadn't been an accident.

It made no fucking sense. I'd spent ten years aching for her. So why did the thought of kissing her now feel... wrong? Like crossing a line I couldn't uncross. Like if I did, there would be no going back.

But where was this feeling exactly from?

My mind flashed to Sera in the locker room, her palm cracking across my face before I could close the distance between us. I hadn't hesitated then.

But with Celeste...

The realization sat in my gut like bad sushi as I slid into my car, the metallic tang of Sera's blood still clinging to the upholstery.