

My Sister 148

Chapter 148 DUTY AND DESIRE

KIERAN'S POV

I stood there like an idiot long after Sera was gone.

The background music continued, and the crowd was fizzling out into the late night; Byron had stepped off the stage and was busy thanking patrons.

But I couldn't move.

The dance still lingered in my muscles, as if her body hadn't truly left my arms. I could still feel the imprint she'd left: the dip of her waist, the silk of her hair, the curve of her hips.

Gods, had it always felt that way to hold Sera? So calming and peaceful and...right?

With the rogue issues and the LST and ruling my pack, my life over the past couple of weeks had been a frenzy of relentless motion.

And then, for three minutes, under dim bar lights, it had all just...stopped.

Nothing else existed for me except the echo of her laugh, the rhythm of her heart thudding against my chest, the lavender of her scent permeating my every pore.

And it had felt like...peace.

I didn't even realize I was capable of feeling that kind of serenity until she gave it to me.

My hands twitched at my side, and I had to dig my heels into the ground to stop myself from racing out of the bar, finding Sera, wrapping her in my arms, and never letting go.

Ten years. I had her with me for ten years, and I never—

“So, what’s the story there?” Byron’s gruff voice cut through my thoughts, pulling me back to the present. He was beside me again, eyes twinkling like the devil’s. “You two have the same last name. But siblings do not look at each other the way you two did.”

I opened my mouth, then shut it.

At this moment, the anonymity I cherished with Byron had turned into an adversary.

Because what was I supposed to say? That Sera had been my wife once? That I’d ruined us both? That divorcing her felt like the biggest mistake I’d ever made?

Byron noted my hesitation and nodded, raising his hands in mock surrender. “Fine, I won’t pry.”

I exhaled and ran a hand through my hair. “It’s...complicated.”

I internally scoffed. That word didn’t even begin to scratch the surface of my relationship with Sera, but it was all I had right now.

“You like her,” Byron said simply, not as a question but as a fact.

I froze.

Like.

The word felt so...small. So trivial. It couldn’t capture the complexity of the feelings I had for Sera. Even I couldn’t put a name to it—it was all so complicated and overlapping and conflicting, and ‘like’ didn’t even come close.

Byron must have mistaken my silence for bashfulness.

“If you do,” he continued, “don’t waste time. Trust me on this, boy. I wasted plenty when I was falling for Lillian, thinking there would always be another day. And then one morning, she was gone.”

The light in his eyes died, and the grief that flashed there was so intense I had to look away. “Just...gone. Every day since, I’ve wished I’d said more. Done more. Loved her more.”

His hand landed heavily on my shoulder, grounding and crushing all at once. “Don’t repeat my mistake. I don’t know what the story is, but if she matters to you—and I highly suspect that she does—fight for her.”

I swallowed hard. My throat felt raw, scraped hollow.

How could I explain? That Sera did matter—more than I’d ever let myself fully acknowledge—but not in any way that could be salvaged.

That our bond had been poisoned by disregard and silence, shredded beyond repair. That she looked at me now like a wound that refused to close.

I couldn’t say any of that.

So I just clapped Byron’s shoulder back, forcing my voice steady. “You honored Lillian well tonight. She’d be proud.”

His eyes softened as some of the light returned, and he didn't push further. "Go on. Get out of here before I rope you into singing karaoke."

The image of myself butchering some off-key ballad was enough to propel me out the door.

The night air hit sharp against my skin, cooling sweat on the back of my neck. As I headed to my car, I resisted every urge and instinct that pulled me in the opposite direction—the direction Sera would have headed to get to her new home.

The moment in the bar had been exactly that—a moment.

The reality of my relationship with Sera was that there was no relationship. Nothing left to salvage. Nothing left to hold on to.

I kept telling myself throughout the drive home.

I had a big day ahead of me tomorrow, so I told myself I'd sleep tonight. That maybe the ghost of that dance would lull me into something resembling rest.

But the moment I stepped into my house, that illusion shattered.

Because Celeste was waiting.

She lounged in the foyer chair like she owned the place, legs crossed, a half-empty glass of wine—most likely not her first—dangling from her fingers. Her eyes gleamed in the dim light, sharp and smug.

“Late night, babe?” she purred.

Just like that, all the ire and angst I’d let myself forget about returned with a vengeance.

So much for peace.

My jaw clenched as I turned and slipped my jacket from my shoulders, draping it over the coat rack.

The scent of Byron’s bar still clung to me—oak casks, smoke, old whiskey—and, faintly, Sera. That trace alone had my chest tightening. I knew the moment Celeste caught it, a storm would break.

“Well?” she pressed.

I unclenched my jaw and forced a neutral smile. “I was at an old friend’s anniversary celebration.”

“Anniversary,” she repeated, as though it were a foreign word she was testing.

She slowly rose to her feet, tilting her head, lips curving into something between curiosity and accusation. "So important you couldn't bring your fiancée?"

The word landed heavily. Fiancée.

We hadn't even officially gotten engaged yet, and she was already throwing the title around. But it wasn't even that word itself that irked me.

It was what came next.

Wife.

Luna.

I exhaled quietly, bracing myself.

"You know why I couldn't bring you," I said, keeping my tone even. "You signed up for the LST in secret while knowing that I have a role to play. The rules are strict, Celeste. You've already broken them by insisting on staying here instead of at your packhouse. If I'd paraded you around on my arm tonight, every other challenger would've cried favoritism. They would've used it to disqualify you."

Her eyes narrowed. “So instead you went alone? Left me here to twiddle my thumbs while you celebrated with strangers?”

“Not strangers,” I corrected, resisting the sigh building up. “I told you—Byron’s an old friend. Tonight was his thirtieth wedding anniversary. He and his late wife opened that bar together on the same day. I owed it to him to be there.”

Her expression softened, and she gave me a clipped nod. “Okay.”

I arched a brow, suspicion holding my relief at bay. “Okay?”

She smiled. “Good night, Kie.”

It felt a little too good to be true, but never one to look a gift horse in the mouth, I walked past her further into the house.

I had one foot on the first step when her arctic voice froze me in my steps. “And what did you owe Sera?”

My heart jerked once, hard, like it wanted to leap out of my ribs and run far away from this conversation.

Slowly, I turned.

Celeste was still standing where I'd left her, but now she had my jacket in her hands, condemnation tightening her features.

"I smell her," she whispered, her voice trembling despite the sharp edge. "You saw her. Didn't you?"

There it was—the inevitable.

I sighed, running a hand down my face. "It was a coincidence, Celeste. I didn't plan it. She happened to be there, same as me. That's all."

Her lips pressed into a thin line. She studied me like she was trying to peel me open and see what was written inside.

"Celeste." I forced my voice to stay calm, not to betray the exhaustion and irritation I was feeling. "It was nothing, okay?"

"Then why can I fucking smell her on you?" she hissed.

"I'll go take a shower right now," I countered. I stepped forward and grabbed the jacket out of her hand. "I'll burn all my clothes if you want."

Something flickered on her face—determination. And the next thing I knew, she was pressing herself against me, clutching at my shirt with a desperation I recognized. Here we go again.

“I do want her scent erased,” she breathed, her voice dropping low and sultry. “But there are...other ways.”

Her mouth grazed my neck, her fingers tugging at the buttons of my shirt.

For a moment, I let her, waiting to see if my body would react to hers like it should. I waited for the spark, for heat, for every nerve ending to come alive with maddening want.

But...nothing.

I caught her wrists gently but firmly, holding them still.

“Celeste.” I kept my voice gentle but let warning permeate it. “Tomorrow is the finals. The evidence of what you want to do can’t be washed away by a simple shower. And if anyone finds out you’ve been staying here, it’ll ruin everything. You’ll be disqualified before you even set foot in the Arena.”

“I don’t care about the finals,” she snapped, pulling against my hold. “I care about you. About us. Do you even realize how humiliating it feels to wait here for you, while you come home with my fucking sister’s scent clinging to you like a mark?”

The anguish in her voice might've struck me deeper once. Now, it only pressed against a part of me that was growing more numb by the day. As if my ability to feel—at least where she was concerned—was fading.

I loosened my grip, forcing calm into my words. "Celeste, you've trained too hard to throw it all away now. Don't let needless jealousy rob you of what you've worked for."

I cupped her face and gently caressed her cheeks. "My promise to you still stands. My parents are preparing the announcement. Once the rogue situation is resolved, we'll be officially engaged. I'll keep my word."

Her breathing slowed a fraction, though the tension in her shoulders lingered. Her eyes searched mine, and I hoped to the goddess she couldn't see the conflict in them. "You swear it?"

I bit out the words. "I swear it."

That soothed her, if only partially. She exhaled, a trembling laugh slipping out, then pivoted, gliding toward the side table at the living room entrance.

Her fingers brushed across the sleek music player there, and within seconds, soft piano notes filled the air.

She turned back to me with a small, almost wistful smile. "Do you recognize this song?"

I didn't, but thankfully, she didn't give me a chance to answer. "It's my favorite. I used to play it all the time when we hung out."

"Right."

Then she held her hand out. "Dance with me. For old times' sake."

The request was harmless enough; it was the least I could do after rejecting her yet again. Yet something in me bristled. I didn't know if it was my wolf or my own conflicted humanity.

Still, I stepped forward, resting my hand lightly against her waist as she pressed close. She tilted her head back, eyes shining, lips curved as the music wrapped around us.

She leaned into me, her warmth undeniable, the jasmine of her scent purging the lavender that still lingered around me. "This is nice, right?" she whispered.

It should have been more than nice. It should have been perfect. Celeste was beautiful. Familiar. Mine—supposedly.

But as we moved slowly across the polished floor, my chest stayed hollow.

The truth gnawed at me. It had felt so easy with Sera, natural. So blissfully effortless.

And now?

With Celeste in my arms, I felt only the effort of holding together an image that was already cracking.

Now I was caught between duty and desire, between a promise I'd made and a bond that seemed to grow stronger the harder I tried to sever it.

Celeste rested her cheek against my chest, humming contentedly with the music, her arms tightening around me as if she could tether me in place.

And all I could do was wish she were someone else.