

My Sister 20

Chapter 20 THE LAW OF ELASTICITY

KIERAN'S POV

The low rumble of the city and the sharp chorus of traffic drifted through the tall windows behind my desk, but today, they carried no familiar comfort. The glowing skyline of downtown LA blurred into meaningless lights as my thoughts circled the same point again and again—Sera.

Papers spread before me on my desk, untouched. Architectural renderings. Expansion blueprints. Signed contracts. All things I should've been focused on.

But every line and glossy print twisted into the curve of her frown, the cerulean blue of her eyes, the pale blonde of her hair, the bite behind her words as I replayed every interaction we'd had since the divorce, dissecting each one over and over again.

Sera had always been meek and reclusive, and when Celeste came into the picture, I'd expected no less from her.

What I didn't expect was this... stranger who kicked people out of her hospital room and blocked my calls and dished out scathing remarks like they were going out of fashion.

Worst of all was that she'd tactfully kept her distance. I guess it was foolish of me to expect anything less. After all, she'd spent the decade we were married like a snail, retreating deeper into her shell, even managing to keep me in the dark about her career.

"Sunset Ridge acquisition closed this morning. No press as usual—our shell company did the buyout clean."

Gavin sat across from me, reading out from his tablet.

I nodded. "Okay."

He cleared his throat and continued. "The zoning pushback you feared has been handled. Councilman Ortego got his incentive as scheduled, disguised as a campaign donation."

Another nod. "Good."

"We've also purchased the unicorns you requested. They like their new habitat with the leprechauns at the end of the rainbow."

"Perfect."

A loaded silence followed, and my mind backtracked for a second before I sighed. "Ha ha," I deadpanned, folding my arms as I leaned back into my seat with an exhale.

Gavin wasn't amused, though. His steely eyes were fixed on me like a mirror that refused to flatter.

I sighed. "What?"

He looked at me for a beat longer before he shook his head. "Nothing. Shall we continue?"

I nodded. "Sure."

"The Malibu compound's under—"

"It's about time for her security shift change, right?"

A muscle ticked in Gavin's jaw as his hands dropped to his lap.

"You asked about her security this morning," he said flatly. "And again, this afternoon. And again, thirty minutes ago. And before that, every single day for the last week."

What the fuck?

When—how—did I turn into this... obsessive mother hen? I'd thought more about Sera in the last couple of weeks than the entire decade of our marriage, and her presence in my mind was showing no signs of departing.

"Indulge me," I said through clenched teeth.

Gavin sighed, sliding a finger across his tablet.

"We've got wolves posted at opposite corners of her perimeter at every point in time, rotating in four-hour shifts," he said in a practiced drone, like he'd repeated this a million times—which he kind of had. "We've got surveillance drones in the surrounding trees. Motion sensors. Noise scanners. One of the security teams has a human ex-Marine bonded to the pack. The others are elite pack members."

He glanced up with a sigh. "Short of moving in with her, there's nothing more we or you can do to ensure her safety."

I ran a hand through my hair, the tension in me not easing. "And you're certain there've been no breaches?"

"A hundred percent."

I exhaled, the leather of my seat creaking underneath me as I shifted my weight.

"Ten years," Gavin muttered, his tone thoughtful.

My gaze jumped to his. "What?"

"You and Seraphina were married ten years, and I have never seen you so... unnerved when it came to her."

My arms tightened. "She didn't get shot in those ten years."

His gaze sharpened, like he could cut me open and inspect my insides. "And you're sure that's all it is?"

Gavin's brows shot up, and his head tipped back to look at me when, instead of answering, I stood abruptly.

"I need a drink," I declared.

I needed to stop thinking about Sera, and evidently, I couldn't do that with my own willpower.

Luna Noire pulsed with soft jazz, velvet walls muting the outside world, pulsing lights casting everything in a bruised-red glow. Wolves lounged on curved leather banquettes, glasses in hand, their laughter feral and unfiltered.

The bar gleamed like obsidian under candlelight, and, like a sailor to the call of a Siren, I moved towards it, drawn by the promise of momentary distraction.

The distraction came quicker than I expected when Gavin and I climbed onto the bar stools—next to Ethan.

"I know why I'm here," I started, eyeing my ex—and most likely future—brother-in-law. "Why are you?"

Ethan chuckled, a dry, empty sound that contrasted with the liveliness in the bar.

"How are things with Sera?" he asked instead of answering.

My chest tightened. Fuck. So much for a distraction.

I signaled to the bartender. "Whiskey. Neat."

A minute later, a glass slid into my waiting hand. "Leave the bottle," I muttered.

I downed the first glass in one gulp before filling it again.

"Fine," I bit out.

Ethan scoffed. "Paid her a visit about a week ago to check up on her."

I winced. "And how did that go?"

His hand tightened around his glass of scotch. "She hates me." Those three words sounded like they'd burned on their way out of his throat.

"She doesn't—"

He shook his head. "You didn't see the look in her eyes. It was like—"

"Ice," we said simultaneously.

Ethan looked at me, his eyes heavy, and the smile I was going for came out as a grimace.

"She's... different," he said quietly. "The Sera I knew used to be..."

"Kind," I added. "Demure."

He shook his head. "I don't know what changed."

Gavin scoffed next to me, and both of us turned to him, brows raised in question.

He didn't shrink under the weight of the stare of two Alphas, shrugging instead. "According to the law of elasticity, if a force greater than the elastic limit of an object is applied..."

He slipped a rubber band out of his pocket, hooked both thumbs at opposing edges, and, with a sharp jerk of his hand, pulled so hard that it snapped.

He raised a brow at both of us. "Call it the law of elasticity, call it self-preservation. Sera reached her limit and snapped. Simple."

I stared at Gavin in stunned silence, his words settling inside me like an anchor. Ethan let out a low hiss, and when I turned to him, his face was tight.

"I called her a viper," he groaned. "I threatened her right after our father died—fuck!" He buried his head in his hands, his whole body shuddering.

"I—"

Where would I start from? If I began to list all the altercations I'd committed towards Sera over the last ten years, we would be here forever.

I'd neglected her, treated her as less-than, pushed her away every time she attempted to get close. She'd always been reserved, quiet, but... maybe I had snuffed out her voice, choked her with silence and contempt, and now—

"There you two are," a sultry voice broke through the uneasy silence.

I stiffened when a hand stroked my back, the scent of jasmine wrapping around me. The familiar comfort it should have brought eluded me, replaced instead by puzzling agitation.

Celeste leaned over, her long golden curls brushing the granite of the countertop. "Hi, babe." She beamed, her hands stroking up my back to my neck.

The urge to shrug her hands off me hit me, and I frowned to myself. What the fuck was wrong with me? This was Celeste, the woman I loved. Her touch was welcome. She was—

She pressed her body against my side and leaned in, her lips brushing the shell of my ear as she whispered, "I've missed you."

My control snapped, and just like in the hospital when she tried to kiss me, my reaction was completely instinctive—I was jerking back with a snarl before I could stop myself.

My eyes widened, three simultaneous sharp inhales resonating around me. I could feel Gavin and Ethan's astonishment behind me, but my eyes were fixed on Celeste, on the way her face paled with shock and tightened with hurt.

"Kieran?" she whispered, her voice trembling.

Shit.

I shot up from my stool and reached for Celeste, pulling her into my arms. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry," I muttered, laying my head on her crown.

She was rigid against me, her arms dangling by her side.

Could she feel my heart thundering against her? Could she sense the mortification that consumed me?

"I'm sorry," I choked out again.

I gripped her shoulders and pulled away slightly so I could look her in the eyes. They were glassy, tears brimming in their depths, poised to spill over.

Fuck. I'd sworn to myself that I wouldn't hurt Celeste when she came back to me, not after what had happened ten years ago.

What the fuck was wrong with me?

"I'm sorry," I repeated. "I've had a long, shitty day, and I was on edge. I shouldn't have taken it out on you."

The words felt like sandpaper in my mouth.

I was on edge. I'd had a shitty day? Because I'd spent the entire fucking time thinking about my ex-wife.

What the hell was happening to me?

Celeste sniffed, furiously blinking. "It's o-okay."

I shook my head. "No, it's not." I cupped her face, my thumb catching a tear that escaped. "Let me make it up to you."

Her brows knit. "How?"

I smiled. "You always wanted to visit the rooftop garden here, but you couldn't because we weren't old enough, remember?"

She glanced towards the ceiling, and a faint smile ghosted her lips. "You promised to take me on my twenty-first birthday."

But she was gone by then. Because of what I'd done.

I pushed that thought away and forced a smile as I slid my hand down her arm and intertwined our fingers. "I'll take you now."

Her smile broadened. "Okay."

I nodded towards Ethan and Gavin before leading Celeste out.

The building that housed Luna Noire had three floors. The first two were the bar—the first floor for select humans, the second for werewolves. The third was a restaurant, and the roof was the Moon Garden.

It was a hidden sanctuary—walled with moon-silvered herbs and night-blooming jasmine. Twinkling lights circled the perimeter, casting a soft glow over moongrass, rune-marked stones, and a central fire pit that glowed like molten gold.

As we stepped through the glass hatch into the moon-kissed night, Celeste took a deep breath, and her hand in mine tightened.

"Oh, it's beautiful, Kieran," she breathed.

But her voice sounded far away, muffled by the blood roaring in my ears as I glared at the fire pit, at the couple seated on the bench that curved around it.

She was enveloped by a gigantic jacket that had to belong to him, and she was smiling at him, her fingers twirling around the stem of an Evening Primrose.

For a second, I forgot everything and everyone. All my senses honed in on the two of them, and it was all I could do not to surge forward and rip him away from her—then rip him apart.

Sera and Lucian.