

My Sister 202

Chapter 202 HOT COALS

KIERAN'S POV

I knew I'd made a mistake the moment she refused the seafood.

It wasn't what she said—it was how she said it.

Her tone wasn't accusatory. It was calm, factual. Beneath it lay a quiet, restrained edge that cut straight through me.

I wanted to say something, anything, but nothing I could offer would change the truth embedded in her tone—that there were entire years of her life I knew nothing about. Moments I'd forfeited.

And this—this gesture, this echo of the dream she once wrote—was supposed to be my way of making things right.

Except, watching her now across the candlelit table, calmly instructing the waiter to cancel the special seafood platter I'd preordered, I realized just how far off the mark I was.

All I'd done was remind her of a version of us that had never existed.

Sera wasn't the woman from the story.

And I wasn't the man she imagined beside her.

Daniel chattered between us, filling the silence with his boyish enthusiasm.

He talked about his training and his instructors, and as he spoke, Sera's tense expression gradually softened, the lines on her forehead smoothing as she listened. Then, somewhere between Daniel's story about almost being caught sneaking cookies during a strategy session and his impression of his grandfather, Sera laughed—light, melodic, warm.

The sound of it caught me off guard.

Gods, I'd missed that sound.

Was that wrong? To miss something that had never been yours?

Because that was how I felt.

I'd missed everything about her—the way she tilted her head towards you when she was paying attention, the way her fingers curled lightly when she was deep in thought, the spark that used to fill her eyes when she looked at me like I hung the moon.

That spark was gone now. I'd ignored it till it fizzled out, replaced by icy indifference.

And as I listened to her talk softly with Daniel, it hit me just how blind I had been for so long.

How could I have not recognized her? How could I have let someone else come in and occupy the space I had carved for her when we met?

After learning the truth—that she was that girl from all those years ago—I'd gone back and read her books properly. Not just skimmed them like I had when I first found out she was an author.

I read them in-depth. Every word, every metaphor, every heartbreak disguised as fiction.

Her stories weren't about us. Not exactly.

But I could see us in the shadows of every page, the ghosts of our past woven into every line.

The way her heroines loved—recklessly, passionately, without apology.

The way her heroes always showed up, always said what I never did.

Every time one of her characters whispered 'I choose you', 'I want you', it felt like a confession she'd buried in ink.

And I'd missed it.

I'd missed her.

So I made this desperate, futile attempt.

I built a moment from her memories, not her present. I tried to offer her the fantasy she'd once wanted—forgetting that she no longer needed fantasies.

The Sera before me had endured, suffered, healed, evolved. And I was still seeing her as the woman who once wrote me in metaphors.

So instead of speaking—and inevitably making things worse—I stayed quiet.

I listened, half present, half adrift in a spiral of regret and remorse as Daniel told her about his new training schedule, how he'd beaten one of his mentors in a sparring exercise, how he was growing stronger.

His eyes shone with pride, and Sera's glowed with that fierce, tender affection that only she could give.

She leaned forward as he spoke, utterly absorbed, her smile soft and warm. Her thumb swiped sauce from the corner of his mouth in a small, absent-minded gesture that made something tighten deep in my chest.

It was absolutely fucking ridiculous to be jealous of my own son, but watching her look at him like that—like he was her entire world—made me ache in ways I didn't know how to name.

The music from the quartet blended with the rhythmic hush of the waves. Lantern light flickered against the glass, and for a second, when she turned her head just so, the reflection caught in her eyes made them glow like sapphires.

I wondered what she would do if I told her I loved her.

Ten years—hell, one year—ago, that was probably all she wanted. Not anymore. Not after everything I'd broken.

When the meal ended, Daniel insisted on dessert—a chocolate tart that came dusted with gold flakes. He and Sera shared it, laughing when the flakes stuck to his nose.

Even though the gesture didn't have the effect I desired, I could see she was happy with Daniel. That had to be enough.

Even though it felt like hot coals being stuffed down my throat, I had to start getting used to the idea of her happiness—without me.

When we finally left the restaurant, the night air was cooler. The ocean roared gently beneath the terrace, the scent of salt and flowers following us out to the parking lot.

Daniel fell asleep—fake or real, at this point, I couldn't tell—halfway through the drive, his head lolling against the window, his breath steady.

The silence in the car was still, like we were both holding our breaths.

Sera's gaze was fixed outside, the streetlights brushing gold across her features as we drove. Every now and then, I caught her faint smile reflected in the window when Daniel mumbled something in his sleep.

When I pulled into her driveway, she finally turned to me.

"Thank you for dinner," she said quietly.

I let out a soft, bitter laugh. “For what? Dredging up bad memories about sushi?”

That drew a small breath of laughter from her—barely there, but real.

“You know what they say—it’s the thought that counts.” Her eyes met mine, the longest eye contact we’d made all day.

I hesitated, then reached into the glove compartment. My fingers brushed against the box I’d placed there earlier, and for a moment I almost reconsidered.

But then I thought of all the times I hadn’t said or done what I should have. All the moments I’d let pass in silence that had led us to this point—standing on opposite sides of a cavern that seemed to grow wider and wider every day.

I couldn’t do that again.

“I, uh...wanted to give you something.” Before I could second-guess any further, I handed her the box.

Her brows furrowed slightly as she took it. “What’s this?”

Another attempt at redemption. Very likely to be another miss.

“Just—open it.”