

My Sister 22

Chapter 22 BREAKING POINT

KIERAN'S POV

My shoulder still burned from where Sera had brushed past me.

The contact had been brief but packed with enough tension that it sparked like a live wire. I stared at the exit long after she and Lucian had disappeared, a prickly, electric sensation simmering beneath my skin—anger, disbelief. Something else I wasn't ready to name.

A quiet sigh broke my trance.

I turned to Celeste. "I don't think I'm much in the mood for sightseeing anymore," she said. Her voice was calm, but something edged it—something I couldn't quite pin down. "Can we go?"

I exhaled slowly, trying to expel the anger and unease lodged in my trachea. That moment with Sera and Lucian had scraped open something jagged inside me.

But Celeste was here, beside me. I needed to focus on that.

I pulled her closer to me and pressed a kiss to her temple. "I'm so sorry."

She shook her head gently. "I know it's not your fault."

She wound her arms around my waist and gave me a small, hopeful smile. "Why don't we order takeout from the restaurant? Go back to your place? Just you and me. No surprises, no interruptions."

More than anything, I wanted to be alone right now, but I swallowed down that feeling and smiled at Celeste. "That sounds perfect."

Since she'd driven to the bar, Celeste and I drove separately back to my house.

The drive back was short, but my thoughts ran far, looping in restless circles.

It had been just over three weeks since the divorce, and ten years of routine hadn't dissolved in twenty-one days. I still reached for habits that were no longer mine. Still paused at the door, expecting Daniel's thundering footsteps rushing to welcome me, Sera's quiet "Welcome home." I still half-listened for the soft clink of her cooking in the kitchen, for the faint scent of cinnamon and clove wafting from a candle she'd always kept lit.

But every time I walked into the house now, there was only empty silence.

And tonight, when I stepped inside with Celeste's hand in mine, that silence echoed louder than ever.

I tried to ignore it.

This would be our home someday—mine and Celeste's. I had to start laying the foundation.

She slipped her arms around my waist again, pressing her cheek to my chest. "Hmm," she murmured. "Feels like I've barely had a moment with you since I got back."

I kissed the top of her head, closing my eyes for a beat. "I'm sorry. Things have just been... chaotic."

That was true. But it wasn't the whole truth.

I needed to do better. I couldn't keep letting my past bleed into every moment of the present.

Sera was gone. Celeste was here.

This was my second chance. I couldn't keep fumbling it.

She tilted her face up, her expression warm and open. "You can make it up to me now."

This time, when she leaned up to kiss me, I steeled myself and let our lips meet.

She tasted like strawberries and wine, sweet and soft. She pressed closer, wrapping her arms around my neck, her body molding to mine. I hesitated—just for a breath—and then kissed her back.

I braced a hand on her waist, trying to lose myself in the warmth of her touch, the shape of her against me.

But somewhere beneath the kiss, beneath the softness of her skin and the curve of her smile against my mouth, something inside me remained distant. A part of me that couldn't shake off that feeling of wrongness.

Celeste was my home now, and I...

I exhaled, pulling away.

Her hands hung on my shoulders, blinking up at me in question. "Kie?"

I forced a smile through the hazy fog of emotions in my chest.

I held up the bag of takeout. "We should eat."

She shook her head, took the box out of my hand, and set it on the console table in the foyer. "I can't think about food right now," she whispered as she gripped my shirt and pulled me to her again.

I tried. I really, really tried. I owed Celeste that.

But when her hands slid under my shirt, warm against my skin, a shiver rocked through me. Her body pressed against me, soft and unfamiliar, and something inside me froze.

I pulled back slowly and caught her wrists, gently stilling her. "Celeste..."

She exhaled and looked at me, her expression already shifting. "What now?"

"I can't," I said, my voice barely held together. "Not tonight."

Her face fell. Just slightly at first—a flicker of disbelief. Then, something deeper.

"You can't..." Hurt. Quiet, raw, and rising fast. "Or you don't want to?"

"No. It's not that. I just—" I scrambled for the right words to say, to fix the cracks I could sense opening between us. "I'm not... ready, Celeste. I don't want to pretend I am and hurt you more because of it."

She looked at me for a long, tense minute and then let out a quiet scoff and took a step back.

I felt the distance immediately, and I was appalled by my lack of will to close it. Tension lined Celeste's body. Her back was straight, her shoulders tight, but I could feel her composure slipping.

"You're. Not. Ready." She spelled out each word as if it were a code she was trying to decipher.

"Celeste—"

"I've been alone for ten years," she said suddenly, her voice flat. "When I left, I thought it was the right thing—space, time, whatever. But it hurt like hell, Kieran. And I missed you so fucking much."

"I missed you, too," I said. And I meant it.

She let out a soft, bitter laugh. "Yeah, I'm sure you spent the last ten years pining after me while married to my sister."

I took a step closer. "Celeste, I did."

"You don't see it, do you?" she whispered. "You're acting like nothing's changed. Like she still belongs in your life. Like I'm the one who doesn't."

"It's not like that," I rushed to say, but the words felt thin in my mouth.

She wiped her eyes with a quick swipe of her fingers, smudging her mascara. "I thought coming back would mean something—that I'd still matter to you. That we could resume where we left off before... her."

"You do matter."

She wrapped her arms around herself, and her voice was bitter with sarcasm when she said, "Yeah, I feel pretty fucking important right now."

"Wait." I caught her wrist as she started walking away. "Don't go," I said, the words catching in my throat. "Please."

She shook her head slowly, pulling her arm out of my grasp. "Goodnight, Kieran," she said quietly, flatly.

I wanted to fight harder, make her stay. But all I could do was stand there, paralyzed by guilt and confusion.

And then she was gone.

The door closed behind her with a quiet click, and the emptiness crowded me.

I stood in the foyer for a long time, staring at the door, my hands clenched at my side. The silence around me felt louder than any argument, and Celeste's words seemed to bounce off the wall, an echo of pain.

'You're acting like nothing's changed. Like she still belongs in your life. Like I'm the one who doesn't.'

"Fuck," I swore, running a hand of frustration through my hair.

Sera didn't belong in my life, not anymore, and I couldn't understand why I couldn't let her go. Why was I still stubbornly holding on to a woman I never really wanted at the expense of the woman of my dreams?

I'd hurt Celeste ten years ago by what Sera and I had done, and now I was hurting her again because I couldn't seem to fucking let go of Sera.

Celeste was all that mattered to me now, and I had to fix it before it was too late. So I forced my heavy legs to move and grabbed my keys.

I was halfway to Ethan's house, where Celeste was staying, when my phone rang.

Daniel's name lit up the screen like a tiny ray of sunshine piercing storm clouds.

"Hey, champ," I greeted, forcing a light tone. "It's way past your bedtime. What are you doing up?"

"Hi, Dad. I couldn't sleep, so I called Mom to talk to her, but I couldn't reach her."

My grip on the wheel tightened, mirroring the force with which irrational anxiety gripped me. "I'm sure she just went to bed early, bud."

"Well... okay. But she always answers my call. Can you check on her?"

"Yeah." I nodded, forgetting he couldn't see me. "I'll take care of it. Good night, Danny."

I hung up and immediately called Gavin.

"Hey, what's up?"

"I need a status report on Sera," I said, trying to keep my tone even.

Gavin sighed. "Kieran, this—"

"I have no time for a lecture, Gavin," I snapped.

There was a heavy sigh and a mumbled, "Gimme a minute."

And then: "She's home. The last hourly report shows a male matching Lucian Reed's description entering the house with her; he hasn't exited since."

A chill spread in my stomach as I pulled the car over to the side of the road. "How long ago?" I bit out.

"Fifty-two minutes ago."

Lucian. In her house. For an hour. Doors closed. Phones off.

I sat in silence for a moment, the engine humming around me. All thoughts of reconciling with and apologizing to Celeste took a back seat.

The longer I sat, the more insistent that prickly tension grew inside me. I couldn't stop picturing Lucian and Sera behind closed doors—laughing, talking... doing gods know what else.

I hated how my mind filled in the blanks with images I didn't want but couldn't escape.

By the time I hit the gas again, I wasn't thinking anymore.

I barely remembered the drive—just the blur of streetlights and a knot twisting in my chest tighter with every block.

When I pulled up outside Sera's house, Lucian's car wasn't in her driveway.

But that new information did nothing to quell the volatile energy thrumming through my veins.

I walked up to the door and slammed my fists against it insistently.

A moment passed. Then another.

And then the door opened.

Sera stood there in a loose bathrobe, her hair damp like she'd just gotten out of the shower. Her skin glowed with a soft, dewy sheen, and a flush colored her cheeks.

Her eyes, devastatingly beautiful, widened in surprise.

I didn't see Lucian. But I didn't need to.

My eyes took her in—the robe, the damp hair, the faint scent of lavender drifting out into the night air—and my brain came to its conclusion.

"Where is he?" I asked, my voice low, rough.

Her brows pulled together. "What?"

I stepped closer. "Where. Is. Lucian?" I was going to tear him apart limb from limb.

"Kieran, what the fuck?"

But I couldn't answer Sera. The jealousy, the frustration—it all swelled to a breaking point. My eyes swept over her again, and I hated how badly I wanted her, how much it wrecked me to imagine her with anyone else.

Something in me snapped.

I grabbed her by the waist, and this time, she was too stunned to stop me from kissing her—hard.