

My Sister 225

Chapter 225 STEAM AND ICE

KIERAN'S POV

Time dragged; I had no idea how long. The rain still fell in steady patters against the window.

Steam curled off Sera's skin, and her breaths came shallow, uneven. Every so often, she whimpered—soft, broken sounds—like she was fighting something in her dreams.

'In cases like this...a mate bond would stabilize her.'

I swore softly, holding her tighter, her heat burning into me even as the cold around us stabbed like tiny needles.

Frustration made my teeth grind, even as they chattered.

If there was even a fragment of a bond between Sera and me, it had to respond. It just had to.

But...

So much time had passed, and still nothing happened.

No spark. No warmth. No familiar pull.

Each second carved a bigger hollow of dread inside me.

Had I imagined it all?

Had I convinced myself she was my mate just to justify wanting her?

Maybe she never belonged to me at all.

I pressed my forehead to her shoulder.

“If I had just marked you,” I whispered, voice splintering. “The night of the Blood Moon Hunt. The night we married. The day Daniel was born. Any damn day over the last ten years—we wouldn’t be here. I could help you now.”

I closed my eyes; my throat tightened.

“But I didn’t. I was a coward. A fucking idiot.” I took a shuddering breath. “And you’re paying for it.”

The room was silent except for rain against the window and Sera’s faint, ragged breaths.

‘Regretting the past is pointless,’ Ashar’s voice was a morose rumble, offering a small comfort. ‘All we can do is move forward and focus on what we can do for her now.’

I tightened my hold on Sera.

“Do you remember,” I murmured, brushing my thumb over her skin, “the night Daniel had a fever, and you stayed up holding him because he wouldn’t let you go?”

My voice shook with the memory.

“You didn’t know I was watching from the crack in his door. You kept whispering that he was safe. That you were right there. You didn’t sleep for thirty-six hours. I thought you were going to collapse.”

I swallowed.

“Now it’s my turn.”

I pulled her closer, pressing a kiss to her temple.

“And I’m not going anywhere.”

I shifted slightly, cradling her tighter. Water sloshed over the edge, cold splattering tile and dripping from my elbows, but I didn’t care. The world could flood, and I wouldn’t move.

“You know...” My voice rasped, raw. “I always thought strength was loud. Violent. Teeth and claws and dominance. The kind of power I was raised to believe mattered.”

I brushed a wet strand of hair from her cheek, fingers trembling.

“But you—” I swallowed hard. “You were strong in ways I didn’t even know how to see.”

Her lips parted slightly, a soft exhale leaving her, her brow tightening like she was fighting something inside.

“You stood up to a world that didn’t want you. You kept getting back up even when the people who should’ve protected you were the ones pushing you down. You smiled through things that would have broken mere mortals.”

Pain tightened my throat so much I could barely squeeze the words out.

“And I was too blind, too stubborn, too stuck in my own fucking narrative to see you for who you were.”

A shiver ran through her, and water rippled as I tightened my hold, my body instinctively trying to shield hers despite knowing warmth was the enemy right now.

“You deserved better than being my obligation. You deserved better than ten years of silence and resentment.”

My voice dropped to a rough whisper, breaking beneath the weight of regret.

“You deserved a partner. A mate. Someone who saw you. Someone who chose you.”

My breath shook, warm enough to mist the cold air between our faces.

“And instead you got me.”

Silence stretched, heavy and echoing, broken only by the drip of water and the soft chattering of Sera’s teeth as her fever finally clashed with the cold.

“You know what kills me most?” I whispered, jaw tightening. “You never stopped trying anyway. Not for the pack. Not for Daniel. Not even for me. You probably thought I didn’t notice, but I did.”

I closed my eyes, letting the truth finally drag itself out of me.

“I knew you learnt about all of my favorite sports and hobbies so we would have something to talk about. I knew you learnt to cook all my favorite meals. I knew you tried to dress like Celeste so I would notice you.”

I brushed my lips against her damp hair, a breath of a kiss.

“It shouldn’t have taken me this long to see it, Sera,” I whispered feverishly. “Whether or not I recognized you as that little girl from all those years ago, it shouldn’t have taken me so long to realize you weren’t just someone fate trapped me with. You were someone I would have chosen if I’d had half a brain.”

Water sloshed again as I held her tighter, nearly crushing her to me, as if pressure alone could force life back into her.

“I felt it every time you smiled at Daniel like he was made of starlight. Every time you stood up to Celeste, even when it cost you everything. Every time you looked at me like I mattered, even when I didn’t deserve it.”

My chest ached.

“I was too stupid to recognize it. Too afraid to admit it. Too busy clinging to who I thought I was supposed to love instead of seeing who was right in front of me.”

I pressed her hand to my lips, breathing in the faint scent of her skin.

“You don’t owe me anything. Not forgiveness. Not affection. Not a future. But—” My voice shook. “Please don’t leave me like this, Sera. I’ll give anything. I’ll take your pain if I could. Fuck, I’ll take your hate and animosity. Just stay.”

Her lashes fluttered—barely. A twitch. A ghost of movement.

My heart slammed against my ribs.

“Sera?”

She didn’t wake. The tremor passed.

“I don’t care if we’re mates,” I whispered. “I don’t care if we’re not. I don’t care if whatever bond I thought I felt was just me wanting something I had no right to want. I don’t need a mark to claim you. I don’t need fate to validate what I feel.”

My lips ghosted over her brow.

“I’m choosing you now, and I’ll choose you every goddamn day you let me.”

My voice went hoarse, low, trembling, and the words I couldn’t say earlier ripped out of me.

“I love you, Sera.”

The words fell into the steam and ice—quiet, unstaged, unplanned. Too late. Too true.

I swallowed, chest constricting.

“And I will never forgive myself that the first time I say it out loud is in a bathtub trying to keep you alive.”

Her fingers brushed weakly against my arms, and my breath hitched. It was faint, barely there, as if her body was answering when her voice couldn’t.

I lowered my forehead to the back of her head, shaking with relief and fear.

The cold seeped deeper, numbing my limbs. Her heat continued to fade, slowly, painfully slow, like her body was surrendering the fever but still pushing toward unconsciousness.

“That’s it,” I breathed. “Come back to me, sweetheart. Please.”

She exhaled a soft, shaky breath; a sound like something inside her eased.

Her head tilted back slightly toward my neck.

Not enough. Not consciousness.

But enough to keep hope burning.

Time continued to pass. The water warmed around us. The world outside fell silent.

And I held Sera as if the only thing keeping her tethered to life was my heartbeat pressed against her back, beating steady, beating stubborn, refusing to stop for anything.

Eventually, thankfully, her fever broke. Her trembling grew more pronounced, small spasms wracking her limbs, her teeth chattering louder.

Relief nearly knocked the breath out of me.

“Okay,” I murmured, brushing my thumb across her cheek. “That’s good, sweetheart; that’s enough. Let’s get you out.”

I shifted, gathering her against my chest. Water splashed over the edge as I stood with her in my arms, rivulets cascading down both our bodies and pooling on the marble.

Sera shivered violently now, her forehead pressed to my throat, breath hitching in soft, involuntary gasps.

“I know,” I whispered against her wet hair. “I’ve got you. I’ve got you.”

I stepped out of the tub, water dripping onto the floor with every movement. I reached for a thin linen blanket hanging near the vanity. Anything thicker would trap heat.

I wrapped it around her carefully, tucking the corners around her shoulders, covering her chest and legs, leaving only her head exposed. Her skin was still warm beneath my hands, but no longer scalding, thank gods.

I took her out of the bathroom and into the room where I lowered her onto the mattress with as much care as if she were made of glass. The sheets soaked through immediately, but I didn’t care.

As I pulled away to readjust, she whimpered softly at the loss of my heat, reaching blindly for me even in unconsciousness.

I lay beside her immediately, gathering her back against me, arms locking around her waist, her legs curling weakly against mine.

She shivered again—shallow, rapid tremors shaking her from head to toe.

I pressed my lips to her temple, eyes closing.

“That’s it,” I murmured, voice rough. “Shiver. Fight your way back. Stay here with me.”

One of her hands fisted weakly on my chest, like she was trying to anchor herself to me even in unconsciousness.

I lowered my forehead to hers, breathing her in.

“You’re doing so well, Sera,” I whispered. “Just fight a little longer.”

Her only answer was another shuddering breath and the soft, instinctive way she burrowed deeper into my arms, seeking warmth now that the fever had loosened its grip.

I tightened my hold.

And didn't let go.