

My Sister 243

Chapter 243: TAWDRY CLICHÉS

KIERAN'S POV

I came here to pick up Daniel's sneakers that he'd forgotten.

It didn't matter that he'd packed six other pairs and couldn't even remember the exact color.

All that mattered was that my son needed his blue—or green or purple?—sneakers, and I'd be a terrible father if I didn't do everything in my power to retrieve them for him.

I clung to that transparent, pathetic excuse as I unlocked the door with Daniel's spare key and stepped into Sera's house.

Her presence saturated the space. Scent. Warmth. Memory. It permeated the air, seeped into the walls, settled onto every surface, as if she had only just stepped out of the room.

It enveloped me the instant I crossed the threshold, thick enough to stir the bond and tighten something deep in my chest.

Ashar's voice rumbled with aching yearning. 'Her scent is everywhere. But I need more.'

"So do I," I murmured.

I moved farther inside, slow and careful, as if one wrong step might disturb the delicate illusion that she was still here, just out of sight.

The living room was immaculate—almost unnervingly so. Pillows lined up perfectly. Blanket folded with her signature crisp precision. Surfaces spotless, not a single object out of place.

Too clean.

That was the problem.

Sera lived neatly, yes, but she lived.

She left traces—an open book, a pen uncapped, a pair of slippers angled toward the couch, a hair tie abandoned on the coffee table.

But now?

There was nothing. Everything was tidy in a way that felt...final.

The sight felt like a whispered reminder:

She wasn't here.

She wouldn't be here tonight.

Or tomorrow.

Or for weeks. Maybe months.

I walked through the narrow dining area, my hand grazing the back of a chair as if touching it could bridge the distance between us. As if I might capture some last trace of her warmth in my palm.

Everywhere I looked, I saw her.

Sera cooking dinner with Daniel hovering beside her.

Sera laughing softly as she watched him draw at the table.

Sera curling up on the couch with a book, legs tucked beneath her.

Sera walking past me without meeting my eyes because looking at me hurt her too much.

The tightness in my chest pulsed.

I climbed the stairs, my steps wavering.

Daniel's room—that was my destination.

But Sera's bedroom door was open. Just a crack.

Just enough.

I shouldn't go in. I knew that.

But my hand lifted anyway, pushing the door open until the room lay exposed—quiet, untouched, painfully empty.

Her vanity displayed perfectly organized skincare bottles, a small ceramic tray with her rings, a hairbrush resting beside it with a single strand of pale hair caught in the bristles.

Her nightstand had a notebook stacked on top of two novels, a pen tucked inside like she'd planned to pick up right where she left off.

A sweater hung over the back of her desk chair.

The curtains were drawn, but a small gap between the panels let in a thin sliver of afternoon light.

Everything of Sera's was here.

Except Sera.

It was her room.

Her home

Her life.

And she wasn't in it.

Unable to take it anymore, I turned to walk away—and froze.

My gaze zeroed in on the spot near the entryway, where I had kissed her.

Where she had kissed me back.

Where everything inside me had detonated, and everything inside her had trembled in answer.

My breath shuddered.

Ashar prowled beneath my skin, restless, agitated.

'You should've taken her then and there,' he snarled. 'Should've claimed her. Marked her. Then she wouldn't be out there—alone, exposed, where anyone could touch her or tempt her or—'

“Enough,” I muttered.

‘Not enough,” he snapped. “You should’ve been bolder. You shouldn’t have stopped. Even if you were going to let her go, you should have given her an experience she’d never forget. Something she’d think about every night she was away. A memory burned into her skin, so nothing else could compete.’

I pinched the bridge of my nose. “Since when do you enjoy tawdry clichés?”

‘Since I realized our mate is out there meeting new people while we’re standing here clutching her damn sweater,’ he shot back.

I glanced down.

Shit.

I was clutching her sweater. How did I—when did I—

I dropped it immediately.

Ashar huffed. ‘Pathetic.’

I ran a hand down my face. “I’m aware.”

He circled in my mind, bristling. ‘She’ll meet someone. Don’t think she won’t. She’s radiant. Powerful. Beautiful. And not everyone is a blind, deaf moron like you.’

That thought pierced me like a blade.

Because it was true.

Lucian had proven that already—captivated by the very qualities I'd overlooked for years, the ones I didn't recognize until it was nearly too late.

And beyond him...gods. Sera walking freely through human and werewolf cities alike? There wasn't a soul alive with half a pulse who wouldn't notice her. Want her. Chase her.

The idea was a nightmare.

"She deserves to be wanted," I murmured, the words strained.

'Yeah, no shit,' Ashar snapped. "Does that mean you're going to sit here and do nothing? Just let her wander off and take her pick of the world?"

"I promised her I wouldn't follow," I said. "If I leave Daniel to chase her, she'll murder me."

'Good, yes, stay with Daniel.' His tone turned derisive. 'Sit there like a neutered pet and twiddle your thumb. I'm sure the bond—you know, the one she's terrified of—is enough to keep her.'

A muscle in my jaw ticked.

I had grown complacent after the bond awakened—too confident in its inevitability, too certain that Sera would eventually return to me.

I forgot that a bond was a connection, not a chain.

That Sera was a woman who'd been suppressed, silenced, reduced for most of her life—and now that she was finally discovering herself, she might not choose me at all.

I had spent ten years destroying every reason she had to stay.

Why the hell did I think awakening the bond magically erased all that?

I leaned a shoulder against the wall, closing my eyes.

"I can't chase her," I murmured. "What right do I have? I wasted a decade. She's finally free. If I run after her now, after I promised I wouldn't, she'll think I'm trying to trap her again."

Ashar snarled, frustrated and furious. 'So that's it? We just wait?'

"I told her I'd be here when she returned," I said. "For Daniel. For her. I meant it."

'Waiting doesn't mean doing nothing, dammit!' he growled. 'Fine. You can't physically chase her. I get it. But...' His tone shifted. 'Can't you remind her of us another way? Keep yourself in her mind. In her heart. In her thoughts.'

I frowned. "What the hell are you suggesting?"

'Think, Kieran,' Ashar purred. 'You're not helpless. You're not weak. You're her mate. She left to find herself; don't let her forget you in the process.'

"How—"

Slowly, a plan began to form, taking shape like mist resolving into something solid.

A way to reach Sera without trapping her. A way to remind her she wasn't walking alone.

A way to let her feel me—my support, my devotion, my patience—across whatever distance she needed.

Ashar's approval hummed. 'Ah. There it is. You're finally thinking.'

For the first time since stepping into Sera's home, I exhaled a breath that didn't hurt.

"I know what to do."