

My Sister 269

Chapter 269 SMALL TALK

SERAPHINA'S POV

I woke to the sound of the sea.

Not the violent crash or sharp slap of water, but the slow, breathing rhythm of waves folding into themselves, over and over again.

The room was washed in pale morning light, the curtains stirring softly as if nudged awake alongside me.

For a moment, I lay still, suspended between sleep and memory.

Then the memory of my mother's call surfaced, unbidden.

The clipped pauses. The careful half-answers. The way she'd evaded again, as she always did.

A small knot formed beneath my ribs—not sharp enough to hurt, not heavy enough to crush. Just...there.

‘You’re allowed to feel it,’ Alina said gently.

I exhaled into the pillow. ‘I know.’

‘But you’re not allowed to let it slow you.’

That drew a faint smile. I rolled onto my back, eyes tracing the ceiling beams. The disappointment lingered, thin and translucent, like morning mist—present, but already dissolving in the light.

“She doesn’t get to decide how far I go anymore,” I murmured aloud.

Alina’s presence warmed in quiet agreement. ‘You came this far on your own strength. You’ll reach the end the same way.’

That settled something inside me.

I dressed quickly and made my way downstairs, following the sound of voices and light footsteps echoing through the open hall.

“Good morning!”

Dora barreled into me at full speed before I even reached the last step, tiny arms wrapping around my legs with familiar certainty.

Half her curls were sleep-tangled, the rest woven into little braids. Her blue-and-gold eyes sparkled like sunrise.

“You didn’t disappear,” she announced, clearly relieved.

I laughed, crouching automatically. “Was that a concern?”

She nodded solemnly. “Sometimes, I have really strong dreams, and then I wake up, and there isn’t a mermaid hugging me. I thought you were a dream, too.”

I giggled, smoothing her hair back gently. “Not today.”

Her grin returned instantly, contagious and unguarded.

No adults were in sight, but breakfast was already in full swing. Kai sat at the head of the table, methodically buttering toast while keeping half an eye on his siblings.

Dora darted out of my arms and plopped herself in front of Neri, who rolled her eyes fondly before she continued braiding her little sister’s hair with practiced fingers.

Reef crouched by the open doors, utterly absorbed in something small and wriggling, cradled carefully in his hands.

“Morning,” I greeted.

Kai looked up first, offering a polite nod and smile. “Good morning, Sera. Did you sleep well?”

I was a little taken aback by his grown-up tone. “I did, thank you.”

Neri beamed at me from behind Dora. “You should let me braid your hair later.”

Reef popped up beside me. “Do you want to see a sand dragon?”

I blinked. “A...what?”

He thrust his hands forward. Inside was a twisted knot of driftwood, damp and crooked—unmistakably wood, and yet, somehow, also unmistakably a dragon.

“It guards the tide pools,” he explained earnestly. “This one’s old. Probably older than the pack.”

“That’s...fascinating.”

“Our parents have a meeting this morning,” Kai informed me, “and—”

Dora cut her brother off, tugging my sleeve impatiently, having once again slipped out of Neri’s hold.
“We’re going to the beach. You’re coming.”

I glanced down the corridor leading deeper into the estate—toward Corin’s likely whereabouts, toward a thousand unanswered questions cued up in my mind.

Then I looked down at Dora’s expectant face.

“Okay,” I sighed. “Just for a little while.”

Her cheer was immediate and explosive.

In a blur of buttered toast and coffee, I found myself heading to the beach with Selene’s children.

The beach was beautiful in broad daylight. The tide was low, exposing broad stretches of wet sand that gleamed like polished glass.

Seagulls wheeled overhead, calling to each other as the children raced ahead, flinging off shoes and jackets with wild abandon.

With Kai around, I quickly understood why there wasn't an adult watching the kids.

He stationed himself instinctively—close enough to step in, far enough to let them roam free.

Now and then, his gaze flicked to Dora, tracking her movements with quiet vigilance that reminded me painfully of someone else.

Neri gathered shells with delicate focus, arranging them into small patterns while humming.

Her voice, light and melodic, drifted across the shore. To my astonishment, a cluster of seabirds gathered nearby, hopping and swaying as if enchanted by her song.

"Dora calls her a werewolf Snow White," Kai said quietly when he noticed me watching. "The birds like her singing."

Neri flushed at his words but didn't stop singing.

Reef dragged me from discovery to discovery—holes that were definitely homes to ancient sea spirits, smooth stones that could absolutely grant wishes if thrown correctly, and a piece of seaweed he insisted was proof of a legendary leviathan sighting.

I listened, I laughed, I crouched and peered and pretended with a carelessness I'd forgotten I possessed.

Selene's children were wonderful, each one unique and special in their own way.

And yet...

Every time Dora squealed with delight, every time Kai patiently reigned in Reef's wilder impulses, every time Reef's wilder impulses broke free, something tugged at my chest.

Daniel would love this.

The thought arrived uninvited, warm and aching all at once.

I pictured him running wild with the kids on the sand, as free and happy as he'd been on Kieran's island, and my heart clenched.

When the kids decided that beach volleyball played just at the edge of the shore was the next great adventure, I hesitated.

“I think I’ll watch,” I said lightly. “From over there.”

Kai studied me for a moment, perceptive beyond his years—like Daniel. “You don’t like the water much, do you?”

I met his gaze and smiled. An image of another beach, of a high wave consuming me, flashed in my mind.

“I’m...working on it.”

He nodded, accepting that answer without pressing.

I perched on a cluster of sun-warmed rocks, just out of reach of the tide, and pulled out my phone.

Daniel picked up on the second ring.

Except it wasn’t Daniel.

“Sera?”

Kieran's face filled the screen.

"Oh," I said, startled. "Hi. I—sorry, I was calling Daniel."

"He's still training," Kieran replied. "I can get him if you want."

"No, it's fine," I said quickly. "I can call back later."

I moved to end the call.

"Wait."

Something in his tone stopped me.

He smiled then, not sharp or guarded. Just...soft.

"You look different," he said.

“Let me guess, I’m glowing?”

His own laugh seemed to surprise him, and the sound sent a flutter through my chest.

“That’s the word,” he said. “The sea suits you.”

Heat crept into my cheeks. “Thank you. It’s nice here.”

And because I was polite—not because I’d wondered about him after hearing he’d come after me—I asked, “How...are things?”

Then Kieran and I did something as absurd as skydiving without a parachute: we made small talk.

At first, it was awkward—weather, schedules, the kind of careful conversation built to tiptoe around landmines. But slowly, almost without noticing, the stiffness faded.

I found myself describing Selene’s family, Dora’s insistence on adopting me, Reef’s dragons, and Neri’s singing.

Kieran listened, amused and thoughtful.

“Daniel would love it there,” he said.

“I was just thinking that,” I admitted softly.

Silence settled between us then, surprisingly not uncomfortable.

Kieran seemed different. I couldn't put my finger on it, but the angsty, broody Alpha I knew who'd let me go by the skin of his teeth had been replaced by this...this carefree man with an easy smile who'd asked what my freaking room smelt like.

“Okay, one last round,” Kai called out. “And then we have to go in for dinner.”

Dinner?!

That was when I realized how long we'd been talking. It was the longest conversation I'd ever had with Kieran that didn't end in an argument or leave my chest tight with tension.

I cleared my throat. “I should...check on the kids.”

“Right,” he said, then hesitated before continuing. “Sera. I've been working on something. A...Christmas gift.”

My heart skipped.

“I was hoping,” he added carefully, “that you might be willing to see it when you get back.”

My cheeks burned. I must have been out in the sun too long. “I—I’ll think about it.”

He smiled. “That’s all I ask.”

After the call ended, I sat for a moment longer, staring at the darkened screen.

That was...nice.

An incredulous sound slipped past my lips. Had I accidentally called into an opposite dimension?

Still distracted by the unexpected warmth of my call with Kieran, I stood. The sun dipped lower, shadows stretching across the sand as I stepped toward the children.

Then the world shifted.

The wave came without warning.

Not a gradual surge. Not a teasing pull.

It rose—massive, sudden, wrong—and slammed into the shore with violent force.

Water hit my legs, my waist, my chest—

Then it lifted me clean off my feet.

I gasped, breath tearing from my lungs as cold engulfed me, spinning me sideways, backward, under.

The roar of the sea swallowed everything else.