

My Sister 86

Chapter 86 OLD HABITS

KIERAN'S POV

The wave closed over Sera, and for a heartbeat, I froze.

One second, she was laughing—her hair whipped back, her hands clumsy but determined on the board—and the next, the ocean swallowed her whole.

“Sera!” My voice tore from my chest, ragged, but the sea didn’t care.

Daniel’s scream was sharper, higher-pitched. “Mom!”

I dove without thinking, cutting into the water like instinct. The salt burned my eyes, but none of it mattered.

I’d always trusted the sea—it was familiar, dependable, steady. But in that moment, it felt like an enemy, dragging Sera down, greedy for her.

When I found her, her hair was streaming like dark ribbons around her face, her eyes closed, her limbs slack. Too still. Too quiet.

The sight carved into me with the precision of a surgical blade.

No. Not Sera. Not like this.

I hauled her up, my arms straining, lungs burning as I dragged her back toward the surface. I felt her grip dig into my arm, and I would have exhaled in relief if there was any air left in my lungs.

Every second stretched longer than it should have, a cruel delay between the depth and the air.

By the time I hit the shallows, Daniel was already knee-deep, panic etched into his face. “Dad! Do something!” His voice cracked. “She’s not breathing—give her mouth-to-mouth!”

I lay her flat on the sand, my chest heaving, even as hers stayed still. Her skin was cold, her lips pale.

“Sera, come on. Come back to me.”

My hands shook as I tilted her head back, and I paused as I hovered over her lips, remembering the last time we’d kissed—the taste of her, the way her lips softened under mine.

But this wasn’t a kiss—not really, but my body didn’t care.

Desperation, heat, memory all clashed inside me.

“Please, Dad!” The raw terror in Daniel’s voice snapped me back to reality. “Save her!”

Without giving myself any more time to second-guess, I leaned forward, sealing my lips over Sera’s. I frantically forced air into her lungs, praying she’d take it, praying she’d come back.

Her lips were softer than I remembered. Warmer, even against the chill of the ocean.

‘Focus, damn it!’

After two breaths, I pulled back and my palms pressed hard against her chest, the rhythm instinctive—counting under my breath, thirty compressions, steady and desperate, willing her heart to answer me.

When she didn’t stir, I tilted her head back and pressed my mouth over hers again.

‘Please,’ I begged internally as I breathed into her. ‘I can’t lose you, Sera. Not like this.’

Daniel hovered at my side, his voice trembling. “Is it working? Dad, is it working?”

“Give me a second,” I muttered, my heart hammering so violently I thought it might burst. I pressed my mouth to hers again, pushing harder, fighting the terror clawing at me.

Then—she coughed. The sound was violent, wet, alive, and I’d never heard anything so beautiful in my life.

Water spewed from her lips, splattering against my cheek, and relief hit me so hard I almost collapsed.

Before I could stop myself, I cradled her face in my hands, my thumbs brushing the cold droplets clinging to her skin.

“Sera,” I breathed, my voice sounding scraped raw.

Her lashes fluttered, her gaze hazy and unfocused as she blinked up at me.

For one suspended second, it felt like the world had narrowed to just the two of us—her fragile breaths against my palms, the tremor of life shuddering back into her body, and the unbearable hope surging in my chest.

Her lips parted as if to speak, confusion chasing across her expression, and my chest tightened at the sight.

My name hovered at the edge of her tongue—or maybe it was just wishful thinking. I wanted her to lean on me, to cling to me like she'd done in the water, to need me even for a moment.

But clarity snapped back into her eyes like the crack of a whip. She stiffened beneath me, her hands trembling as she pushed weakly at my chest.

The rejection was small, unsteady—but resolute.

"I'm fine," she rasped, coughing again, dragging herself upright even as her body swayed.

"Mom!"

"Danny—"

He wrapped his arms around her tightly. "Oh, I was so scared, Mom."

She reached up, a hand clinging to his arm, laying her head against his as she shivered. "It's okay, baby," she whispered hoarsely. "I'm okay."

"You're shivering," he noted, pulling away. "I'll go get a towel!"

With that, he shot to his feet and ran to the small cabana in the distance. Sera watched him go, and then sighed, turning back to me.

I reached out to her. "Sera, are you—"

She flinched away from my touch, and my hand dropped into my lap, folding into a fist, my gaze lowering.

That's when I saw it—her wet white shirt was plastered against her skin, practically transparent in the sunlight.

And there it was—the outline of her bra, the delicate pink lace clinging to every curve.

My throat closed, heat flashing low in my body. Damn it. Not now. Not when she'd nearly—

Fuck, she had nearly drowned. And yet, I couldn't stop the surge of want, inappropriate and raw, cutting through the adrenaline.

I forced my eyes up, away, anywhere but the swell of her chest beneath that soaked fabric.

Sera caught me looking.

Her eyes widened, and a flush rose across her cheeks, deeper than the sunburn blooming there. She folded her arms over her chest, hugging herself tightly.

I opened my mouth to speak—to apologize, maybe, or explain—but she was already pushing herself to her feet as Daniel returned with a large towel.

“I should...I should get lunch started,” she muttered, voice frayed. She took the towel from Daniel, smiling softly. “You two stay here.”

Daniel reached for her, worry clouding his expression. “Mom—”

“I’m fine, sweetheart,” she said more gently, ruffling his damp hair. “Stay and play with your dad. I’ll call you when lunch’s ready.”

And just like that, she turned, wrapping the thick towel around her, leaving me kneeling in the sand with my chest still heaving and my pulse refusing to calm.

I had saved her. But I had also lost something again—something I hadn’t even realized I was still chasing.

By the time I came down from my room for lunch, the table on the terrace was already set. The scent hit me first—fresh herbs, garlic, something citrusy layered beneath the salt of the sea breeze.

My stomach twisted; not just from hunger but from the memory of Sera slipping under the waves that morning.

Every time I closed my eyes, I saw her limp in my arms.

Now she stood by the table, arranging serving spoons as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world.

Her hair was still damp—from the ocean or a shower, I didn't know—darker at the ends where it brushed her shoulders, and she'd changed into another soft blouse and shorts, her skin sun-kissed from the morning.

The spread was...too much. Grilled fish, seasoned just the way my father liked it, with lime and pepper. A salad with roasted walnuts and cranberries—my mother's favorite.

Even the rice had the crispy fried shallots Daniel loved crunching on.

And for me, a steak, cooked rare, exactly how I preferred, though she'd once told me she couldn't stand the sight of red on a plate.

For a moment, none of us spoke. My parents exchanged a glance, one I couldn't quite decipher.

Daniel, of course, broke the silence, clapping his hands and bouncing into his chair.

“Mom, you made all of this?!” His voice cracked with excitement.

She chuckled. “Hey, you said you missed my cooking.”

“But you didn’t have to cook for us, too, dear,” my mother said softly.

Sera shrugged, not looking at her, busying herself with pouring Daniel coconut water into his dolphin straw.

“Old habits die hard, I guess.”

An unpleasant memory flashed in my head—Daniel’s birthday, Sera slaving away in the kitchen, making seven different dishes to cater to everyone’s niche tastes. Not a single ‘thank you’ in return.

My chest clenched.

Daniel beamed. “Can we eat now? Please?”

“Of course, baby.”

I caught myself staring at her hands as she served him first, making sure his plate was colorful, balanced—because she knew that was the only way to keep him interested long enough to finish it all.

She didn’t even look my way as she moved around the table, silent, graceful, careful not to take up too much space.

And that hit harder than I expected. For years, I’d let myself believe she was cold. Aloof. That she sat at my table out of obligation, not care.

But watching her now, I remembered how I used to ignore little details like this.

How she’d once tried to do the same thing—cater to tastes I never acknowledged, tried to find common ground with me, involve herself in pack activities.

I hadn’t seen her efforts then. Maybe I hadn’t wanted to.

Daniel dug in noisily, humming with delight as he chewed. My father actually smiled. My mother murmured her thanks.

And me? I found myself gripping the fork as if it were the only thing keeping me steady.

Because the truth was unavoidable: Sera didn't just prepare lunch. She reminded all of us, without a word, of the place she'd always deserved at this table. In this family.

And it was me—always me—who had denied it to her.