

## CHAPTER 110

### Winter POV

Smack. I can feel the sting as he slaps me directly across the face. I put a hand to my cheek. His face is inches from mine and I can smell the sour taste of his breath. "You stupid bitch" he hisses, "where's the beer."

I had forgotten we were out. It was my job to keep the fridge fully stocked, but between school and studying it had slipped my mind. I guess I should be thankful that he left money for his beer, but hardly anything else for actual food.

"I forgot" I mumble, dropping my head to my chest and hoping he might show mercy. But he shows none. Instead, he grabs hold of my arm and twists it as I cry out from the pain, shoving me in front of him and down to the basement, the one place I fear most in the world.

"Please" I beg, but he ignores my pleas for mercy, shoving me so hard down the stairs that I almost trip and fall. I catch myself on the railing just in time.

"Move" he snarls and reluctantly, I place one foot in front of the other, until I'm standing at the base of the stairs, his large frame thundering after me.

I can see it and my whole-body trembles. I don't want to go in there. All that's waiting in there is more pain. More abuse. But he shoves me towards it, hard and my body smacks to the ground. He curses under his breath.

"Move you little bitch" he growls and I get back up, feeling woozy and lightheaded. His eyes are gleaming in the darkness and there's a twisted smile on his face. The bastard is enjoying this.

I stand in front of it, willing my body to move. But I'm paralyzed with fear. He laughs, loudly and pushes me hard, my body flailing as I fall inside the silver cell he's created, just for me. I turn around and he brandishes the whip, the one that digs into flesh and gouges you, at me.

"Father, don't do this" I beg and he shakes his head at me.

"You are no daughter of mine" he spits "you murderer."

I fall silent. I am a murderer. If it wasn't for me, my mother would still be alive. I'm the reason she's dead. I'm the reason my own father and brother hate me.

"Lie down" he orders me and for a moment I waver. What would happen if I defied him? Refused to do as he said? But another part of me knows I'll only make it worse if I try. I lie down on the hard, cold concrete ground, my back exposed. I know what's coming and I bite my lip, trying to hold back the cries.

Thwack. The first hit of the whip lands between my shoulder blades. Even with my clothes on its digging into my skin and when he pulls it back, I can feel large chunks of flesh being pulled along with it. The pain is excruciating.

Thwack. He doesn't hold back, using all of his strength to whip me. I begin to scream, the sounds echoing throughout the otherwise empty basement.

Thwack. I stop counting after the first five. My whole body is now numb with shock. I can't hold back my screams and if anything, that makes him smile even wider. My own father is enjoying hearing me scream from the pain.

Thwack. Blood is pooling around my body on the floor. The whip has silver on it, I can feel my flesh burning and bubbling as it touches the strips where my clothing has ripped and torn.

Thwack. I don't know if I'm going to make it out this time alive. It's the longest he's beaten me for and he shows no signs of letting up. Am I going to die, right here in the basement?

Thwack. I barely feel the smack of the whip anymore. I feel like I might be dying. He gives a grunt.

"You stay in here, you miserable worthless piece of shit" he declares and I hear the door to the cell closing. Part of me is relieved he's finally finished, hearing his footsteps as he storms up the stairs and slams through the basement door. Another part of me is worried I won't live through the night.

I lay there, in my own blood, my head resting on my arms. I can't move. Every single tiny movement I make brings pain. I'll heal from these wounds, but without a wolf it will take some time. Not only that, but I'll be left with yet another bunch of scars on my body to join the old ones. What if I were to kill myself, comes a voice in my head. Finally give Father what he wants and my brother as well? I try to tune out the voice but it's persistent, constant, not letting go. That was the first night, I seriously started to contemplate killing myself. While I didn't go through with it, it stayed on my mind for the rest of my days,

I blink looking up at the ceiling. Ever since Kai had informed me that father had escaped from Johnathon's dungeon, it seems like my memories are coming back in small pieces, of everything my father, and Damien have ever done to me. I can feel the pain, the hurt in the memories. My hands trace the scars on my back and stomach, realizing where they have come from. I never realized just why I feared my father so much, but if the memories were any indication, he was a monster, an evil bastard who

needed to be stopped. The old Winter would have been afraid, would have stayed out of the way and tried to keep herself safe, but the new Winter, the new Winter wanted to be stronger, more courageous. She didn't want to spend the rest of her life in fear.

I get up and wander to the mirror, looking at the back of myself, craning my head over my shoulder. There are all sorts of ugly scars, criss crossing over each other, long white lines that snake around and cover me. They were put there by my own father and my own brother. I feel sickened. How could someone derive such joy from hurting someone?

I think back to the rogue attack that took my mother from me. But I don't remember much. Everything's a blur. I remember being a little kid, out for a picnic with mother, sitting underneath a shady tree. This had been her idea. She had wanted to be outside and Damien and father had refused, wanting to stay indoors. Then she'd smelt something, stiffened and told me to run. But I didn't want to leave her behind. I knew something was dangerously wrong.

"It's rogues, Winter, you have to run" she shouted.

"But mummy" I had cried out.

"No, you need to go" she growled and then shifted.

I don't remember much more than that, other than running across the grounds screaming my head off, bursting inside the house while Father and Damien looked at me.

"Mummy, mummy" I sniveled, pointing.

Father had gone as white as a sheet. "Stay here" he demanded, telling the both of us to stay put.

He went' racing out.

When father had finally come back, his shoulders were slumped and his head was down. He looked miserable, sad. I hadn't known what to do and had gone to hug him, but he pushed me back.

"You" he hissed and I stared at him, my lip quivering "this is all your fault."

"What's wrong daddy?" I'd asked.

"She's dead" he'd growled "because of you"

Being a little girl, I hadn't understood what he meant, but from that night onwards everything had changed and not for the better.

"Winter" Kai said softly, distracting me from my thoughts. "Winter are you alright?" he asks me concerned.

I try to give him a smile but fail miserably. "I'm remembering things, that I would rather not" I say lightly. I'm trying to play it off like it's no big deal, but Kai sees right through me.

"Oh Winter" he murmurs, grabbing hold of me and embracing me tightly "you don't always have to act so brave, you know. I know what your father did to you. I know what Damien did. I don't expect you to just get over that" he explained.

I stifle my sobs but suddenly the gates come crashing open and I'm crying, loudly, on his shoulders as he holds me. Why can't I just be the strong girl that I know I can be? Why does the past affect me so much? Kai just holds me, saying nothing and I soak his shirt in my tears.

Winter, you went through something traumatic, it's alright to cry and to show weakness.

I hate doing it though Sabriel.

Well, the past is shit, no kidding, but the future, the future is what we make of it. This handsome man is most definitely a part of our future.

I like the idea of looking forward instead of backwards. But I don't think I can avoid my memories coming back Sabriel.

I'm not asking you to. I think you need to accept the past so that you can move on to a better future.

Thanks Sabriel, your advice is something I'm going to take into consideration.

I heave a shuddering sigh and burrow into Kai's shoulder. God, he smells delicious, that scent of his is mesmerizing. My mouth is watering just smelling him so near. I can hear his heartbeat and it's so loud, thudding in his chest. Why is his heartbeat so loud? He pulls back from me.

"I think you need to spend some time with Damien, if those memories are coming back to haunt you" he says and I shake my head.

"He hurt me Kai" I say indignantly "he didn't stop my father and he even joined in. What kind of older brother does that to his little sister" I add hurt.

Kai sighs. "It's in the past though Winter, and he did come good. Heck he even travelled all this way to find you. I don't know if you remember how excited you were to see him, but you flung yourself right into his arms."

"But what if he hurts me again?" I ask in a small voice. My god, I sound like a small child, instead of a grown woman. So much for being brave and confident.

Kai looks thoughtful. "I don't think he will, not intentionally. He really seems to love you Winter, and your amnesia hasn't exactly been easy on him either."

Ouch. That hurt. Big time. Who cares about Damien? Not when I was the victim.

"Maybe if you're there, I'll spend time with him. Or if Langdon is there" I say slowly "but I don't want to be left alone with him, not yet at any rate. When he shows me, I can trust him, then I'll see him alone."

"That's fair enough" Kai agrees, giving me a long lingering kiss that has my knees knocking together. "But how about you at least come downstairs. We can all sit together in my study or have lunch together in the dining room?" he suggests.

That sounds too much like being a family, which we are not. I think about the study idea, but I'm not ready to face Damien just yet. I need time to process everything. I need time to be alone and not be pressured to do something I don't want to do. Quite frankly, I just don't want to see my brother just yet.

"Maybe next time" I answer quietly "I think I'm just going to spend time in here and read a book."

He looks like he wants to protest but sees the look on my face and just nods. He quietly leaves.

After he's gone, a thought comes to me and I sigh. I might have to see Damien after all. Because not once, did my father ever tell me, or show me, where he buried our mother.