

CHAPTER 123

Winter POV

I can't believe that my mother is a rogue. I don't know if it was the shock of that, or just finding her so easily that made me faint. When I come to, I see that I'm lying on the couch in the living room, Kai, thankfully dressed now, hovering over me with a concerned look in his eyes.

"Where is she" I gasp, struggling upright. Kai pushes me back down.

"Hold still" he says firmly "she's gone to clean up and will be down any minute. I don't need you fainting again."

I glance over my shoulder to where Damien is standing, looking shell shocked. Langdon is holding his hand and rubbing it, in an attempt to get him to calm down.

Slowly, I sit upright, ignoring Kai's glaring. I want to see my mother. There are so many questions burning on my lips. Damien's as well, no doubt.

"She wanted to stay with you, but I insisted she get some food and clean up first" Kai says fixing his eyes on me. "She needed to eat as did all of them. It was a good call of yours Winter. These rogues meant no harm and you managed to avoid bloodshed. Not to mention found your mother at the same time. Strange coincidence that" he mutters darkly and I just scowl at him.

Coincidences happen all the damn time. Besides, the universe owed me a break, didn't it? After everything I've gone through?

"She better have a damn good reason for leaving us" Damien mutters from behind me, his tone dripping with resentment "or else I'm completely gone from here."

I turn to look at him. "I'm sure there was Damien. Who wants to live their lives as a rogue? Not to mention she was starving. Can't you just hold off your opinion of her until she tells us her story?" I plead.

He folds his arms across his chest and huffs. "I'll give her a chance" he promises "but I'm not promising anything."

"That's all I want you to do" I whisper shakily. I have complete faith that my mother will tell us everything and that nothing she's had to do was her fault. Father chased her away, he had to have.

Footsteps on the stairs make us all look towards it. Damien angrily. Myself eagerly. Kai sits beside me and holds my hand but I barely feel it, my whole body suddenly going completely numb. My mother awkwardly steps into the lounge room. I stare at her in awe. She looks so much healthier already, after getting a meal inside of her and getting cleaned up. Her hair no longer looks like a rat's nest and her skin looks a lot smoother. Less dirty. She no longer resembles a rogue, except for the eyes which continue to glow red. A bit frightening and hard to look past, but I would try. She was still beautiful none the less and really did resemble me. It gave me a nice feeling to look at her.

She wrings her hands together. "May I sit down?" she asks in a hoarse voice.

"Of course," I say, watching as she sits across from me, looking up at Damien and then quickly away. Damn it, I told him to be nice. I glare at him and he raises an eyebrow at me.

"I'm sure you have all sorts of questions. . ." she begins nervously.

"We do" I interrupt "Like what happened to you? Father told us you were killed in a rogue attack."

She looks remorseful. "You have to understand" she begins "when your father and I met, the mate bond linked us together. In the beginning he was charming, kind, fun to be with and he was affectionate" she said bitterly. "But then he started to change. It was only one drink at nighttime, then two and then numerous drinks. I tried to stop him drinking so much, because he was an angry drunk, but he didn't seem to care. "

I lean forward, intent on hearing the rest of the story. "Back then, women were told to keep quiet and deal with it. I can't remember what set him off the first time. whether it was dinner was late or I accidentally burnt some of it, but it made him so angry that he hit me."

I gasp. I didn't remember any of this, but I'd been so young.

She looks away. "Then when you both came along" she said quietly "it went back to being good for a while. He really adored Damien and when Winter came along, he seemed to be really excited about having a daughter" she said with a small smile. "He stopped drinking, worked really hard and spent time with all of us. For a while at least, everything was perfect."

"But it didn't stay that way" I guessed, seeing the sadness in her eyes and the lines across her face as she spoke.

She gave a short bark of laughter.

"No, it didn't stay that way" she agreed "he started to go back to his old ways. The only difference was that he hit me in the privacy of our bedroom, because he didn't want you guys to see it. But it was getting worse and there were times when I thought he was really going to kill me one day. There were times I could barely get myself off the floor and moving to take care of you both."

"Wasn't there someone you could have told?" I ask outraged "some other family members or the Alpha of the Pack? A friend?"

Mother shakes her head. "I no longer had any friends to contact. He had slowly stripped me away from everybody I had in my social circle. The Alpha of the pack was his cousin remember? So, he wouldn't have done anything. As for family, I was an orphan when I met your father. It was one of the reasons I was so happy to discover my mate. I thought I would be getting the family I always wanted."

"So, what happened?"

She sighs. "I met someone. A second chance mate called Lexus who wanted to save me and get me away from your father. He was determined to make sure I lived. But there was a catch. Lexus had been banished from his own pack for daring to be with me, a mother with two children. He was a rogue" she said gently, "and I didn't care because he treated me far better than your father ever had."

"So, you just took off with the rogue and left us" burst out Damien incredulously, glaring down at our mother who flinched. "What, we were too much of a burden for you and your new life" he kept going aggressively. "You figured, hey, I don't want kids anymore, so I'll just leave them behind?"

Tears welled in her eyes. "I would never" she choked out. "I wanted to take you with me. Was going to in fact" she said sniffing "but the day I was having a picnic with Winter, rogues did come. We fought them off, but your father was so angry and incensed with me. He'd somehow found out about Lexus before I rejected him and he used the attack to drag me off and beat me. He beat me so bad that I almost didn't make it" she whispered looking haunted "and he left me for dead in the trees. I couldn't move. If there had been any rogues left, I would have been a goner. Your father was so much stronger than me, especially in wolf form. It was nothing for him to force me to shift and take his abuse. Running away didn't work either" she admitted.

"So how did you survive?" I cut in, resting my arms on my legs and staring straight forward.

"Lexus came and found me. He'd known something was wrong and he'd come looking for me. He found me all bruised and bloodied in the forest and managed to hide me in a cave for a few days while I rested and recovered."

"Why didn't you come back?" I asked.

"I was afraid" she whispered "he'd told me that he'd kill me if I tried to take you both from him. His cousin was the Alpha. Lexus and I would never win in a fight with them. Plus, being with Lexus meant being a rogue and there was every chance you would die with us if we were attacked or forced to defend ourselves. I'm sorry" she sobbed "I have thought of you both every day and wondered what you were doing. Whether you were still alive. I always remembered your birthdays. You were never far from my mind."

"You know he beat Winter too" cut in Damien angrily "you left your daughter to be beaten by him instead. How does that feel mother? Knowing it's your fault."

"Damien" I protest weakly, but my mother's eyes widen in disbelief as she stares at me horrified.

"Oh god Winter, he really did that to you? I had hoped he wouldn't touch you, prayed he wouldn't. I thought maybe it would be different because you were his children."

"As you can see, it wasn't" Damien said nastily.

"Damien stop" I plead "please, it's not like mother's had it easy. She's had to travel as a rogue all this time" I argue "cut her some slack."

"It's alright Winter" mother says "it's the least I deserve. He's not wrong. I can understand his anger. You both have a right to be angry."

But I wasn't angry. I felt incredibly sad for her. She's been running all this time. Starving. Her mate for company but no one else. Missing her children. Never having enough to eat or drink. Never having a real home. She'd suffered. We all had. Was being angry at her going to make any of this better? Would it heal the wounds and the trauma? Or would being angry just cause more suffering, more pain?

"Damien" I say quietly "I get that you're angry but you need to put yourself in her shoes. She had no choice but to run. If we'd become rogues we might have died. Sure, our childhood sucked, but getting angry about it now doesn't make anything better. It just makes you feel even crappier."

He sneers at me and I stare him down. Suddenly his body deflates and he looks miserable, rather than angry. Sad, rather than full of hatred. This

was a shock to him too, I remind myself. He wasn't expecting this either and didn't know how to handle his emotions.

"Where is your mate?" I ask mother quietly and she gives me a sad smile, tucking her hair behind her ears.

"I'm afraid that he died last year" she said looking down at the floor "he was killed for going onto someone's territory by mistake. I couldn't get to him in time."

I feel so much grief for her. How terrible to lose your mate like that.

"I'm sorry for your loss" I whisper feeling choked up. Damien makes a small noise in the background.

"Thank you" she says politely "I miss him each and every day."

I look over at Kai. He knows what I'm about to do and he agrees with me. I take a shaky breath and lean forward. "Mother, I would like you to stay at my pack with me and Kai" I say eagerly "you'd have a home to go to and a place to sleep. Food, water, everything you could ever need."

She looks at me bewildered. "I didn't think either of you would want anything to do with me" she said whispering.

"You thought wrong. Damien also lives at the same pack" I say shooting a glance over my shoulder. My brother gives a tight nod.

"If you're sure" she says thickly.

I get up and give her a hug, embracing her tightly. All of us have wounds to heal, some more than others, but this would be a step in the right direction. I only hope that Damien takes the step forward to and let's go of the past. Before it consumes him completely.