

CHAPTER 127

Damien POV

"How long's it been since you came back here?" asked Langdon with a frown on his face, as we pulled into the driveway of my childhood home. The home stood there, a stark contrast to the others. I'd been expecting to see the grass grown long, sun damaged, prickles everywhere, a sure sign of neglect and the fact that nobody currently lived there. Instead, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the grass was freshly mown, a lovely green color and even the house itself looked like the outdoors had been painted. Then a moment of panic hit me. Had somebody moved into the house while I was gone? Would I knock on the door to find a stranger answering it?

"Someone's living here" I comment to Langdon, pointing at the grass and the house itself "they've maintained the grass and painted the outside. We can't just walk in there."

I'm disappointed. I really wanted to be able to explore the house in detail, away from wandering eyes and even, to my reluctance, away from my sister Winter. I wanted to spend this time with Langdon. Besides there are no guarantees that I'll find anything of use here anyway. But I can't help remembering the pained look on my mother's face when I announced we were coming here and the suspicion that she was harboring some sort of secret.

"No one's living here" Langdon insists, getting out of the car and walking confidently up the driveway. "I had the lawns mowed and house painted. I wanted you to have someplace to get away to, once in a while if you needed it."

He did this for me? I'm speechless for a moment, watching as he retrieves the key from its little hidey hole rock by the door, opening it and ushering me in before him. I glance around the entry way, my eyes blinking to adjust to the light as Langdon turns on several to light the way.

"Where do you want to start?" asks Langdon patiently. I think for a moment. I shudder at the thought of going into the basement. That room's getting left till last if I can help it. "Father's room" I muse "maybe there's something interesting in there."

We make our way back to the far side of the house where his room lay, the only room downstairs. I kick aside empty beer cans and beer bottles, wrinkling my nose at the pungent smell of alcohol. Langdon's brows rise in disgust at the smell as well as I force open the bedroom door. I walk in and look around with dismay. There's bottles and cans, all empty, scattered on the floor, window ledge, top of his dresser and even some against the wall in his bed. There's barely any free space on the floor and I have to place my feet carefully as I walk inside. There are not many places to look. His dresser reveals nothing but clothes. His wardrobe the same, a few miserly photos of himself and mother. Nothing of import. The bathroom contains toiletries, very few of them and under the bed is nothing but empty alcohol bottles. What a waste of time. I kick at the cans near me in anger. Just another reminder of how pathetic my father really was. If it wasn't for Winter, I have no doubts the whole house would have been covered in beer bottles and cans.

"What about the attic" suggests Langdon "don't people put important things up there?" he sounded uncertain.

I laugh. "What, you don't have anything in the attic?"

He shakes his head. "No, who can be bothered climbing up the stairs to place everything? Besides all your stuff should be out on display otherwise it's rubbish" he declares.

I can't argue with that logic. It does make me wonder why we have attics in the first place. Still, he does have a good idea. I haven't stepped foot in that attic at all. It could be harboring all sorts of goodies just waiting to be discovered.

"Let's check the attic" I agree with a smile.

We slowly walk out, dragging bottles and cans with us, despite trying our best not to. I frown. I would have to come back here at a later stage and clean up, clear father's room out. Make it into a habitable bedroom that was nice and airy, for visitors. Besides, I really wanted to erase every single part of that bastard. Doing his room was a good start.

"Where's the damn string" commented Langdon as we wandered upstairs. His eyes were shooting everywhere, a look of fascination on his face. I wryly point to the string almost above us and he flushes. I keep my laughter to myself and reach out with one hand, pulling the string down and moving out of the way as the ladder slides smoothly down. The darkness upstairs beckons. I grin at Langdon.

"Want to go first?" I ask politely.

He snorts and shakes his head. "Wouldn't dream of it, after you" he says with a grin.

I just chuckle and begin to climb the ladder, hoping fervently that the light, when I reach out to pull on it, turns on. To my relief it does and I automatically step aside to let Langdon come up, my eyes sweeping around the room in awe. There was so much stuff that it was impossible to know where to turn. Boxes piled up Haz hardly, toys piled in a corner, even furniture, sat there, covered in dust. How long had this stuff been sitting here? It was almost sad to see the toys piled lonely in the corner.

Langdon's eyes narrow with curiosity and interest. "This is much better" he says cheerfully "much more stuff to look through. More memories to unlock" he declared. I was moving towards the toys, my hands shaking. There was a bear in the corner, a bright blue one, with a white round stomach. I remembered him from my childhood. His name had been Laylay and I'd carried him everywhere. Then one day he'd disappeared and I thought it was because I'd lost him. I'd been inconsolable, mother doing her best as I cried my eyes out. What was he doing up here? I reached out and took him, feeling the softness of his fur and looking at his beady little eyes. Mother must have put the bear up here, but why? Had father made her? I held the bear to my chest, swallowing tightly. I had loved this bear. It brought back nostalgia to be holding it close again.

"His name's Laylay" I tell Langdon, handing the bear to him "he's coming home with us" I add and watch my mate's eyes sharp with genuine interest as he nods.

I exhale, coughing as dust rises up from the floor. My eyes water as I stare over at the multitude of boxes. I take one down and begin to dig through, handing Langdon another one. Most of it contains so much junk that I don't understand why they didn't just donate it or throw it out. Who needs spare cups, glasses and plates? We had so many in the kitchen already that it wasn't funny. We didn't need Tupperware either. There were paperback books that I suspected were placed there with the intention of coming back

down when the bookshelves were put up. Unfortunately, the bookshelves were currently sitting in pieces in the corner of the room. I also noted, rather drily, that there was also an entire box dedicated to wine glasses, beer glasses and shot glasses. No need to wonder whose box that had been.

"I can't believe this. Where are the photobook thingy magig? The actual memories of us all?" I explode. Langdon grunts and rips open another box in front of me as I take a break.

"This one of them?" he asks me and I rush over and pluck the book out of his hand. I smile with delight. It's a scrapbook. I sit next to Langdon and open it up.

"This is a photo of me on my first day of kindergarten" I breathe out, recognizing the uniform on myself.

"You look cute" Langdon teases as I blush.

I pull the page over. This time there's a photo of Winter as a toddler, chasing a butterfly around the garden. Her dress is flying in the air and there's a wide smile on her face. "She looks so happy" Langdon says with a smile, tracing the photo with his finger "like she doesn't have a care in the world."

"She was happy" I say with a lump in my throat "when she was that little, her laughter was infectious. She would spend ages running around, chasing me, playing with her toys. Nothing made her sad. She especially loved mother, was stuck to her like glue." My voice is a little bitter towards the end.

A wedding photo flops out. I pick it up and examine it. Mother's wearing a white dress, like all brides do, standing beside father who's in a tuxedo. While he's beaming with happiness though, a massive smile on his

douchebag face, mother looks grim in comparison, a small tight smile on her face, as though she's anything but happy to be marrying this man. Had she realized what he was like? So why go through with the marriage? Why not call it off and run away? Father doesn't have his red eyes and puffy complexion in the photo, so he hadn't been drinking heavily that day or the day before.

"Not the nicest wedding photo" sighs Langdon scrutinizing them both. "Your mother looks angry."

"That's what I thought as well" I said leaning into him. "Do you think she knew what she was in for with him?"

"Judging by the expression on her face" Langdon said calmly "hell yes."

I carefully placed the wedding photo back and then flipped the page over. I trace the photo with a smile on my face. It's a photo of Winter and I, in costumes for Halloween. There's a massive bowl of candy next to us. Winter is a toddler in this photo too, but adorable in her little princess costume.

"I remember this" I tell Langdon quietly "we weren't allowed to go trick or treating, mother was far too worried about us, but she let us hand out candy to the trick or treaters that came to our door. Winter and I would take turns opening the door and greeting them. We got to stay up later that night and we got to eat some of the candy that was left over by the trick or treaters. Father was home that day, but I don't remember what he did. He wasn't with us, that was for sure" I said annoyed, Still, Winter would like looking at this photo, I decided, and carefully pressed it back in.

"Let's just take this scrapbook home to look at" I suggest, grabbing hold of my bear from Langdon. "Were there any others?" I ask him.

He shakes his head. "Not in the box I was digging through. That was the only one. There are still several boxes that have yet to be opened though. Are you sure you want to go home now?"

"We can come back another time" I say assuring him "it's late and I'm tired. I want to look at this scrapbook properly in the daylight. With you."

"If you're sure" Langdon agrees, getting to his feet and dusting himself off. He reaches for my hand with a smile. I reach out awkwardly to take it and look down to see a photo, slowly fluttering its way to the floor, face down.

"Just let me grab that" I tell Langdon hastily, opening the book and retrieving the photo. I flip the photo over and for a minute or two, what I'm seeing doesn't resonate with me. My whole body goes into shock. Langdon comes to stand beside me. His mouth falls open. This was what mother didn't want me to find, this is what she didn't want me to see. One photograph that exposes all her lies. My whole body begins to shake in anger, my hand clenches tightly around the photo. I feel the urge to wrap my hands around her neck and strangle her to death.

"Calm down Damien, we'll get to the truth" Langdon promises, his own voice filled with meaning.

"She better tell me the truth" I spit out, waving the photo "otherwise she dies Langdon" I say and I mean it, my eyes flashing black as I stare at my mate. For what she's done, she deserves to die. She's no better than my father.