

CHAPTER 135

Winter POV

It's so dark and so cold. It feels like I'm floating, in midair. I can feel my hair hanging down, the clothes on my skin, the air on my flesh. I open my eyes and it feels like I fall for a moment, landing on what looks like nothing, just darkness for miles. I frown. Why can't I feel anything between my feet? What's preventing me from continuing to fall? Have I finally died after all this time? I feel a pang at that. But if I'm dead then what is this? Is it hell, because it certainly isn't heaven.

Winter, Winter, do you hear me?

Come and find me, if you can.

The voice is taunting. Eerie, like an echo from somewhere far away. I turn around in a circle wildly but there's no one there. I can't even tell which direction the voice is coming from. In the end, I give a shrug and begin to walk, feeling like I'm in quicksand, each step a difficult maneuver, my feet slipping as I do. I curse under my breath but what would standing there, doing nothing do for me? As it is, I'm remembering the drug I drank to save Kai's life and ponder the possibility that this is just a horrific dream.

So weak Winter. Is this all you have? You're little more than a pathetic human, struggling to walk when you should be able to run, to fly almost. What a waste.

Fuck you, I think to the voice in my mind, flipping the bird even though there's no one there. I try to speak to Sabriel but for the moment, she's

completely silent and I know the voice in my head isn't her. It's nothing like her. Even if it is sassy. Gabriel's sassiness is different. I fall and my hands slide around frantically. The floor feels cool, almost like glass even. It takes a minute, but I get myself standing again and this time, I notice, my feet don't seem to sink and I can walk normally, albeit slowly, the floor slippery.

That's a little better but you're still nothing but a weakling. Someone who relies on others to save her, content to be a nobody. Who feels the need to change herself but not for the better. You're so slow Winter, can't you see? Come and find me.

The air seems to crackle around me and my hair begins to frizz and stand up all around. Lightning and thunder all around me, water pouring down and soaking me to the skin. I can feel every single droplet as it hits me. It stings. This isn't just water, or is it? The coldness hits me hard and I can feel it in my bones, my whole-body trembling as I begin to walk, slowly, the floor even more slippery and hazardous. What is the purpose of this? Why is the voice tormenting me so? Who does this fucking voice belong to and what does it want from me?

A strike of lightning hits me and I scream out loud, expecting myself to spontaneously combust or something, but instead all I feel is the tiniest bit of pain run through my entire body and then nothing. The thunder is so loud that it's almost impossible to hear my own thoughts, let alone concentrate on anything else. I grit my teeth, shivering violently and continue to walk in the same blasted direction. With all the pain I'm feeling and the sounds I'm hearing, I'm almost a hundred percent certain this isn't a dream, but who knows. Maybe it's that fucking drug I took willingly. Seriously messed up, that's what this is.

Did you feel that lightning hit you? Barely left a mark, didn't it? As though reminding you of the strength you possess? Aren't you tired of always being the victim Winter? Of people hurting you for their own nefarious

purposes? Aren't you sick of these evil people? Wouldn't you like it to be different? You know you do. Somewhere inside of you, part of you wants to hurt them, like they hurt you. Don't lie to yourself anymore Winter. Come and find me.

Now the voice is coaxing me. The thunder disappears and I give a loud sigh of relief. warm air blasting around me. Within moments my clothes and my hair is dry and my body stops trembling. Then the wind becomes harsher, revolving around me, my clothes flying around me wildly as I put my arms up, every step now torture as I try not to slide back in its web. I'm starting to get seriously pissed off now.

"What do you want" I scream out, it fading into the wind "what do you want from me? Why are you doing this?"

I don't know what I expected, but there was no reply. Nothing but my words being bitten and tossed away by the harsh wind. I grit my teeth and force myself forward, feeling fatigued, drained. This, whatever it is, is torture of its own. Maybe I am in hell. If that's the case, it's a lot different than anyone ever envisioned it. It's also fucking annoying. My hands clench into fists as I stride forward, right now I would love nothing more than to get my hands on whoever the voice belongs to.

Would you Winter? What would you do? Fight me? You don't have the guts or the power. I'm far more powerful than you. You wouldn't stand a chance against me. You would lose your life within an instant. Do you know that? Are you ready for death? You seem so eager to die? Pathetic little girl. Come and find me, if you dare.

The wind dies down and I inhale greedily, but the warmth is gone as well. Then the ground beneath me gives a loud cracking noise and I see shards falling down, before larger bits follow, my whole body slipping and sliding as I try to run, to no avail, as the ground vanishes beneath me and I fall, down, down, down, my body kicking and screaming, until finally I

stop. I open my eyes, looking around curiously. There is a hard stone floor beneath my feet, the walls the same material. I can't see a door, as I explore what seems to be a room. In the middle of the room stands an item, covered with a sheet. My eyes go to it. Should I pull the sheet off? There is nothing else to be found. I walk to the front of it, or what I assume is the front of the tall round item and ponder what to do.

Winter, Winter, are you there?

Pathetic girl standing there, so scared.

Are you going to come and find me?

Because there's no leaving this place until you do.

So, what's your decision going to be?

I wonder. . .

The voice is coming from behind the sheet. I stare at it, my hands trembling, before I reach forward and quickly grab hold of the starchy fabric and in one fell swoop, before I change my mind. rip the sheet off and toss it to the side. I stare in shock at a large oval mirror with legs that was hidden beneath it. It's as large as I am and my feet move closer off their own accord before I can stop them. My reflection stares back at me, but different. Her hair is lighter, a whitish blonde, her eyes are a cool clear blue, her skin is pale as porcelain and her lips are a ruby red color. She stands tall, no blemishes on her whatsoever. As I stare, she lifts her t shirt and moves around in a circle, her skin completely clear of any scars, unlike my own which has plenty. She smiles at me triumphantly, her fangs glistening in the light. I reach out to touch the cool surface of the mirror, in awe despite myself.

"Who are you" I whisper and the girl chuckles as I cringe.

It's her, the voice I've been hearing. She cocks her head and studies me. "I'm you, but the you that you haven't embraced yet" she says with a hiss "you still hold back when you should be embracing me" she says a tad bit sadly and I feel a moment of guilt.

I know who she is now. There's no denying it. But still, I say the words out loud to be sure. "You're the vampire side of me, aren't you?"

She reaches out of the mirror and I almost scream as she steps outside of it, the mirror going dark and blank behind her. "I am the other half of you that you stifle out of fear. The part you wanted to be rid of" she sneers, glaring at me as I back away a few steps.

"I don't fear you" I protest, but even I know that's a lie. After what I did to my son of a bitch father, I have feared the vampire side of me, not going to lie.

"I'm not a monster" the other me says sadly, circling around me as I watch her wearily "I merely want to survive. You can control the urges. Is it really so bad to have blood every few days in exchange for strength and speed that is far superior to shifter's."

"It is when you're taking it from people" I hiss.

"But you don't have to. Heck, you could get it from the hospital" she points out and I fall silent. Because she's right, I could.

"You need me" she points out, with a smirk.

I narrow my eyes at her "what makes you think that?"

"Because without me" she says lowly "we will both die. Do you think Vanessa is doing the ritual for your benefit" she hisses, her eyes going blood red "she wants the power that we possess. She's not going to just take our power. She got us pregnant for heaven's sake or have you forgotten?"

I had forgotten. I inhale sharply as I remember. But what would Vanessa's motive be for something like that? I stare at the vampire in confusion. "I don't understand why she needed us pregnant" I say helplessly, no longer moving away from her.

"Because the King wants an heir. She plans on taking our child and inserting it into her during the ritual to trick him. A half witch, half siren struggles to conceive and she's too impatient to wait years for it to happen. She cannot have our child Winter; I will not allow it."

"Nor will I" I snap.

"Then be honest. You are too weak as just a shifter to save yourself, let alone our child and Kai. You need me, or will you take the risk of failing?"

I wouldn't take the risk. It was far too great. Neither was I going to lose my baby, even if I hadn't liked how it was conceived. Kai and everyone else, including my child, was too important to me. I look at her helplessly.

"What do I need to do?" I ask, making my decision. Vanessa was going down. I didn't care about the consequences.

She smiles at me. "You need to embrace me fully" she says calmly. "Walk into me child, close your eyes and become one. A mark will appear on your forearm if you do it right."

We didn't have time to lose. She was beginning to look concerned. "We must move; they are taking you outside for the spell. Hurry up Winter" she urged.

I gather up my courage and move forward. Once I'm right in front of her, I take a deep breath and walk into her. It's not an easy process. Every step or movement is indescribable pain as our bodies meld together. Something she failed to tell me; I think a bit sourly. Eventually though, after using all my strength and fighting for it, there is but one of us standing there.

"Close your eyes" the voice comes to me unbidden and I do, imagining us as one, myself as both shifter and vampire. No longer repulsed by the fact. No longer horrified by the vampire aspect of me. Because I need her. I need both sides of myself and I was realizing that now.

I feel a burning sensation on my forearm. My eyes flutter open and I watch wide eyed as a Celtic, tribal tattoo appears on my arm, glittering slightly before becoming a dark black that was very prominent on my pale skin. My fangs popped out with ease as I flexed my arm. It was time to wake up.