

CHAPTER 16

Winter POV

I'm dreading going into the house after being so late. My father is going to be pissed that dinner's not on the table, but to my shock, the house is pitch black, with no lights in the house on at all. Even my brother appears to be missing. I almost shouted out hallelujah in my excitement, shuffling along in pain until I reached the kitchen.

There are signs father has been home most of the day. Tons of beer bottles, most empty, sat on the old, faded, wooden dining table. I sigh. If he's gone out, it's most likely he's gone to the pub. This means he won't be home until late, with luck, well after I've gone to bed. It's almost as if the moon goddess decided to give me a helping hand and I can't help but begin to hum under my breath despite everything.

Then I hear it. The smallest sound but loud enough to cause me to freeze in terror, the creak of the front door as it opens and I turn in hesitation, praying it's not my father. I hadn't had enough time to start dinner yet and I could feel my body beginning to tremble, my hands shaking as I stood and waited to see who it was.

"Winter" I heard my brother's shout and my heart began to beat at a normal pace again. I could handle Damien, but I wondered what he wanted and why he wasn't out smoking weed with his friends.

"Where are you?" he growls.

"In the kitchen" I squeaked, feeling timid like a small mouse must feel. I heard his footsteps approaching, loud on the wooden floors of the living room.

He almost barrels inside and then stop, folding his arms and glaring at me. I'm a bit confused. Had I done something to upset him? Or was he just finding any excuse to wind me up?

"You idiot" he snaps, waving his arms around "why didn't you tell me or ring me?"

I blink. Tell him what? I'm completely puzzled.

"Instead," he says heatedly, "I overhear that Jessica bitch bragging about how she's beaten up my little sister and her cheerleader friends helped her."
"

I say nothing, I'm absolutely speechless and confused about why he's angry with me. Since when did he give a damn about me or what I went through every day? I feel nothing but emptiness inside of me and rising anger.

"How bad is it?" he says tightly and I still, bite my lip and look away from him. As if I'm going to answer him.

He's impatient though, and before I can stop him, he's lifting up my jumper and shirt while I struggle helplessly. There's nothing I can do, he's much stronger than me, and I see his eyes widen as he takes in the bandage as well as the yellowing of old bruises all over my ribcage and stomach. I blush as I realize how far he's pulled them up and quickly tug them down as his eyes turn black.

I can't take it anymore. "Why do you care" I spit out, folding my arms and trying not to wince at the pain "since when did you ever give a damn about me, your little sister? You've made my life a living hell, Damien, you have no right to pretend to care now." I'm almost shouting, by now and my brother, to give him credit, doesn't interrupt me.

Instead, he waits until I'm done before speaking, in a gentle voice instead of an angry one, his hands held out as though begging for forgiveness. "Winter," he says, almost pleading with me as I raise my eyebrows "I

know what I've done to you is wrong, and believe me, it's been bad. I have always hated you for killing our mother..." he trails off and I interrupt him.

"I didn't kill our mother" I almost screamed furiously, tears flowing down my cheeks as I began to sob. It's always the same thing with him and my father, blaming me for something that was completely out of my control.

"I know" he shouts back, frustrated, and I gape at him. Had he just said that? After all these years, was he finally waking up to the fact that I'd just been an innocent child who couldn't do anything to help my mother? I'm suspicious.

"I've spent years listening to father ramble on about it being your fault" he snaps, running a hand through his hair impatiently, "and because I was young, and I was angry, I believed him when he turned on you. So, help me God I let that bastard lie to me and manipulate me. There's no excuse for what I've done to you, Winter. I know that and I don't expect you to forgive me instantly" he says irritably, "but at least hear me out. "

Oh, I'm hearing him alright but I'm not about to let my guard down. I've done it too many times before and been disappointed, but some part of me, a very small part, wants to believe him. I desperately want my big brother to actually tell the truth.

"I've been thinking a lot lately" he exhales and glances at me, looking very guilty, "and I can't stand to hurt you anymore. If mum was still alive, she'd kick my ass for what father and I have been doing to you. She'd kill me and I'd deserve it. I've failed her by failing you," he said urgently, and I felt my heart skip a beat. He seemed so genuine, so sincere that a tiny spark of hope lit up inside of me.

"I'm not going to expect you to believe me, but I'm going to show you just how much I can change" he continues "I want to be a big brother and not a coward who listens to his father instead of thinking for himself. "

I'm starting to wonder if he smoked some weed and mixed it with drugs. This wasn't anything I would ever have expected in a million years of my brother. It seemed too good to be true. I heaved a big sigh. Actions meant more than words and I decided I would wait and see what he'd do next.

We both stiffen as the front door opens and I can't help myself, my body shaking instinctively as I smell the disgusting odor of our father as he approaches the kitchen, stumbling along, well and truly inebriated. To my astonishment, Damien pushes me behind him and faces my father, who merely shoots him with a glance.

"Out of my way boy," he snaps, "I want another beer", he slurs and Damien seems to tense. I'm praying that there isn't going to be a fight.

Then father starts to stumble and Damien reluctantly catches him as he falls unconscious in his arms, giving me a disgusted look. "Drunk as a skunk like usual" he complains, picking him up and placing him on the couch while I watch. "Hope he has one hell of a hangover when he wakes up" he curses. He looks around the kitchen just as his stomach growls. I wait for him to demand dinner, but instead, he surprises me once again. "How about I order us both a pizza for dinner? My treat."