

CHAPTER 2

Damien POV

It's night time and I'm hanging out with my best friends and laughing at their stupid jokes, beer in hand, all of us in the forest and blatantly smoking weed while drinking. Like we give a shit if one of the patrols comes across us. Hell, it's not like dad cares what I do.

"Hey bro" my best mate, Thomas says, tossing me another one. "how's your sister going," he teases me and I roll my eyes. Even to me, it's plainly obvious that he's got a bit of a crush on her. Not that I'll let him near her. Yuck.

"She's not my sister" I snapped back, thoroughly irritated, "and you know it. She's the reason my mother is dead and I hate her", I exhaled, taking a sip of my beer while my other friend Dylan chortled.

"I gotta say, man, she's hot stuff though," he says, and I turn to him threateningly.

"What do you mean by that" I hiss and he shut up instantly, recognizing that he'd gone too far. I'm not being protective of my sister, on the contrary, but that doesn't mean they can make remarks about Winter like that either.

"Stay away from her" I countered, "she's nothing but trouble. Just ask my father" I add darkly, "the only thing she's good for is housework", I mutter, and they nod, content to sip their beers and say nothing at all, just chill and hang out. It's far more relaxing in any case than going home, that's for sure.

"Damnit, Man, I had better get back before mother comes looking", Dylan says bitterly with a scowl "she's been on my case since we all got

suspended from school”, he adds, speaking sarcastically, and I give him a sympathetic look as he ambles off. In my case, my father could care less what happened when it came to my school work, let alone if I bothered to do it, which in itself was a blessing. All he cares about is fucking Winter and what she's done to both of us.

“How about you dude?” I asked Thomas, wanting him to stay a little longer with me. But he just sighs and puts out his blunt, looking regretfully at me. I guess he even has trouble with his parents.

“Same, my parents are none too pleased about the suspension either,” he says grimly, “dad threatened to kick the shit out of me, not that he would, of course, but it makes him feel better about it if it looks like he cares.”

I grimace. I have met Thomas's parents and they aren't exactly a cakewalk either.

“What are you going to do tonight?” asked Thomas as I put out my own blunt and took a swig of my beer, effectively finishing it in one gulp. I raise my eyebrows at him and shrug my shoulders, not really fussed about what I’m doing. I finally get to go to school tomorrow after a week away and I can’t think of anything better than seeing poor defenseless little Winter being bullied by my friends and the popular group at school. I wonder if she’s still up or if she’s gone to bed, if dad is drunk, just like any other night.

“I guess I’ll go home,” I said with a sigh, “maybe I’ll get lucky and Winter will still be up to tease”. I add laughing to myself just a little at the thought and, of course, Thomas laughs, clapping me on the back and walking away as I throw the beer bottle on the floor and smash it, walking in the opposite direction.

I know I'll have to head home; there's no point staying out here by myself, especially since all of the beer has been drunk and the weed smoked. But I also know what to expect when I get home and I'm not looking forward to it. My dad can be a right asshole when he's flat-out drunk, which is

almost every single night. Sometimes he'll yell insults at me, but the majority of the time he's screaming at Winter. She bears the brunt of it and has been since she was five years old and our mother died. Part of me felt sorry for her initially, but now all I can see is my mother's grave in my mind and the feeling passes.

I put my hands in my jeans pockets and began to saunter towards the house, taking my sweet time as though I could prolong it for as long as possible. I cringe at the thought of having to carry dad to his bedroom again. Lately, his drinking has gotten worse and I know, Winter probably as well, that it won't be too long until the old man loses yet another job due to his drinking. It wouldn't be the first time, but he's always worse when that happens. I shudder, maybe I'll get lucky tonight and he'll have passed out in his room, that would be a blessing in itself.

As I walked back towards home, I suddenly came to the realization that none of my schoolwork due the next day had been done and gave a wry smile. It looks like there's something I can make Winter do for me after all. She was smarter than I was and easily got me good grades when I made her do my homework. If she was sleeping, I would just wake her up. After all, it's not like she really has a choice. She'd do as I say or face the consequences. I might not be as forceful as dad can be, but Winter knows that it's best to obey me and do whatever I give her. I smirked to myself as I opened the door and went in search of my little sister.

"Oof" she cries out as I throw my backpack at her, and I barely spare her a glance.

"Do my homework tonight" I snarled and ignored the defeated look on her face. She looks close to tears as I leave, but I harden my heart.

Winter's POV

I force myself to wake up early the next morning, in order to get ready for school. I'm so tired I can barely see straight and it's all I can do to make myself get in the shower and get dressed. Damien came home late last night and insisted on me doing his schoolwork and when I didn't move fast enough for his liking he punched me in the stomach, not to mention throwing his damn school bag at me. It was an extremely long night, spent doing my homework on top of his as well. God, I hate him.

I couldn't help myself, stopping to turn and look into the battered mirror atop my shabby dresser. I'm not surprised by the large dark circles under my eyes or the thinness of my figure. I hate the way I look and I know that I'm ugly. My face is pale, so white rather than porcelain, my eyes a dull blue, and my hair a frizzy blonde that's long and lanky. No matter how much I washed my hair, it never seemed to make a difference. My clothes are ripped, hand-me-downs from op shops, jeans with holes in the knees, and a sweater twice the size of me that hangs down way past my knees. I didn't really have anything better to wear and I put my threadbare sneakers on with a grimace. The bottom of them is thin from over-use and I know that one day soon I'm going to have to go and look around the thrift shops and find a new pair to use.

I have barely got the bacon in the pan sizzling and pancakes going, when my father staggers in, looking pale and exhausted, his eyes red and puffed up as he sits there, impatiently waiting for his food. He looks a mess and I hope he cleans himself up before going to work because, at this rate, he'll lose his job. Not that that seemed to bother him though.

"Here's your coffee," I said very quietly, placing it beside his elbow and vehemently hoping he would just drink it this time instead of flinging it away. Apparently, he was too tired to do that this time and he drank it down without a qualm or complaint. Damien also staggered in and sat

down at the table, glaring at me while he waited, drumming his fingers on the table as I hurried as best I could. Just once, I wish they would get off their lazy backsides and give me a damn hand. It wouldn't exactly kill them to help, would it? Besides, he is old enough to make his own breakfast for heaven's sake. I don't dare tell him that though, I'm not exactly in the mood for another bruise.

"Here," I tell them softly, placing their large plates in front of them and going back to the bench where my one measly piece of bacon and a slice of toast waits. It's not even enough to touch the sides of my hunger, but I don't dare take any more in case they see me. I stop short when Damien gets up from the table and comes over, eyeing me maliciously. He's up to something, I just know it and I feel a sense of dread rising inside of me. I try to keep my expression blank so he doesn't see or sense my fear of him.

"What do you think you're doing," he says, and I eye him curiously, my heart already beginning to thump wildly in my chest, anticipating what's about to happen as I hold my breath.

"Eating breakfast", I say nervously, and before I can stop him, his hand shoots out and sends the plate flying to the floor as I stare at him and the broken plate in dismay. What the hell?

"Oops," he says slyly "guess you're going without fatty again", he tosses out as he sits and begins to devour his own delicious breakfast. I said nothing. I'm not fat, in fact, I'm anything but, considering I very rarely get to it. But, after all, what would be the point? Damien can do whatever he likes to me and my father will never once step in and stop him, not when he approves of what my brother does to me. I keep my tears to myself, my stomach growling with hunger.

I take a deep shuddering breath and bend down to pick up the pieces of the broken plate. I salivate at the sight of the bacon and toast on the floor but they are covered in dirt and would be disgusting to eat. I force myself to throw them in the bin. A sharp piece of shard slices my finger and I

watch the blood drip down in fascination. It doesn't even hurt, nothing does anymore, and I clean it on my sweater as I pick the shards up, sadly knowing that this was to be my only food until dinnertime and that I would be starving hungry again today. Dad and Damien don't care, hurrying out of the dining room when they're finished and leaving me to clean up before I can grab my own school bag and walk to school. Damien's already left in his car, for which I'm extremely grateful, as I don't have to worry about what else he might do to me next, and so has my father, who never even says a word to me, not that I expect him too anymore. This leaves me to take my time, wanting to prolong the experience for as long as possible. The school which used to be a sanctuary when I was smaller has now become my own hell, a place for bullies and my brother to torment and make fun of me, and I know exactly what I'm facing, my whole body trembling in fear as I began to traverse through the corridors and make it to class, with the hopeful thought that maybe today would be different and that I would be left alone for once. It was a futile hope.

Winter's POV

It's lunchtime and I'm sitting outside, my poor stomach growling as it smells the delicious scent of other students eating their lunch, my head hung low and my blonde hair hiding my face as though people wouldn't recognize me. I stood out like a sore thumb. It would take a miracle to get through lunchtime without being accosted by one of my bullies.

"Hey loser" I hear and my heart drops. I'd know that voice anywhere, who wouldn't? I looked up tentatively, the other girl eyeing me with a wicked grin. My heart sinks despite telling myself to get a goddamn grip. It's none other than Jessica, the most popular girl in school, her long blonde hair gleaming and shiny in the sunlight, her big blue eyes cold and condemning, her skin a nice golden honey tan, and her figure slim and

clad in a cheerleader's outfit. She lives to humiliate me and all I can do is look up from my position on the grass and wait for what I know is coming. I swallow, my heart thumping loudly in my chest. All I want is to just be left alone, in peace. Is that too much to ask? Why does everyone hate me so much? I've never done anything to them, not that they care about something so mundane as that. They live to make fun of me.

Sure enough, she's clutching a can of soda which she dumps unceremoniously over my head as I shriek, my hair now dripping with cola as she laughs maniacally, her cheerleader group behind her, giggling behind their hands. It's cold, and sticky and trickles down my clothes as I stand up, letting it drip down my back as I shudder. "It's an improvement" laughed Jessica, gesturing towards me as I stared down at the ground "don't you think her hair looks better girls?" she added with a smirk.

There are choruses of "sure does," from behind her and I hope she's satisfied and that she'll leave now. Instead, she walks right up and swings, her fist connecting to my jaw as I flinch, pain already shooting upwards as I place a hand there, my cheek still sore from the previous day.

"You should die, it would be much better for you", Jessica sneered, and I felt tears well up in the corner of my eyes, but I was determined to keep them from falling. I haven't done anything to her, but Jessica's in love with my brother Damien and tortures me so that he'll like her back. Little does she know that he can't stand her, she's so oblivious.

Thankfully, they all leave me and the bell goes for the next class. I stand up awkwardly, my hair still dripping and feeling incredibly sticky. It's going to be a nightmare to wash out later, but I also can't afford to miss class. My grades are the only thing I have left and I work hard so that, eventually, when I do graduate, if I make it until then, I'll be able to leave this town and my so-called family and study, far away at a college of my choice. I'm determined to get the hell out of this town, no matter what it takes, and become a lawyer. If I keep my grades up as I have been, I might even be able to organize a scholarship. Lord knows there's no way in hell

that my father would even dream of paying for my tuition and, quite frankly, I'll be glad to leave. I won't be telling them where I'm going either.

I'm lost in my thoughts as I walk slowly through the hallway, aware of the strange looks I'm receiving and the whispers going on behind my back as my hair clings to my clothes. Thanks, Jessica, I think to myself sourly, it's just what I needed today. To feel disgusting on top of everything else. My hands clench into fists involuntarily every time I picture her smug little face, wanting to punch her lights out and knock the smile right off her face. Not that I would try, I'd be killed within moments by her groupies. Still, part of me wondered if it might actually be worth it.

I make it to my locker, just in time for it to be slammed right onto my hand as I'm trying to pull out the books I need, I shriek as it opens again, looking behind me to see none other than the asshole that is my brother doubled over laughing as I try to curl my fingers and can't. Great, he's broken them again. It would heal because of my shifter blood but it would take hours and the entire time I'd be in agony. My fingers were already throbbing painfully and I swore silently to myself, Damien giving me one last threatening look before dispersing to his own class. Clutching my hand in the other, I reluctantly headed to my next class, wishing violently that this day would be over already and dreading going home once it was. I only have two more classes to get through and then at least most of today will officially be over. Home is worse than school though, and I can't help it, but I wonder whether or not my life is worth living sometimes. Who would miss me if I was gone? No one that's who. But then I remind myself that if I did something like that, it would be letting them win and I refuse to let them break me until I reach that point. No matter what, I will not let them get the best of me. All I have to do is try and be patient until I've graduated. How hard can that possibly be? It's not like things can get any worse than they already are. I will get out of here someday. Until then, I just need to be careful and trust no one.