

CHAPTER 24

Jonathan POV

I'm sitting in the hospital waiting room with Winter's brother Damien and he can't seem to keep still. I don't blame him, all I can see in my mind's eye is Winter, lying there, on the cold tiled floor, blood all over her, her panties missing, and dressed in some sort of lingerie. My wolf had been ready to kill and I'd been more than a little disappointed to find that bastard Thomas was already dead. I was also a little proud of Winter for killing him. She was strong, stronger than I had thought her capable of.

Finally, the wait seems to be over and I jump up as a doctor comes walking over to me. As an Alpha, it rankles that I haven't been allowed back past the waiting area and I'm told it was because I couldn't be there while Winter was going through surgery. Her brother has been deadly quiet since we came here and it's like he's in his own little world, one that I don't want to pull him out of.

"Alpha Johnathon", he greets me cordially, and, finally, I see some life come back to Damien. He sits upright and stares at the doctor hopefully, desperate to hear some sort of news about his sister. I'm anxious about my mate and my wolf is going insane inside my head right now, absolutely beside himself over Winter.

"How is she?" I'm afraid to ask but force the words out. Surely, she can't be dead? I would have felt it through the mate bond, wouldn't I have? I don't know anymore. The doctor looks grim and I feel my heart beginning to pound wildly in my chest.

"Winter is out of surgery" he begins, and I feel a tiny sense of relief, her brother's face lighting up with hope.

I'm afraid to ask but I force the words out anyway, "Was she sexually assaulted?" I croak out and the doctor shakes his head.

"From what we were able to determine, she wasn't sexually assaulted. However, she does have bruises and a gunshot wound to her foot. It's infected so we are giving her antibiotics and monitoring her closely. "

I nodded, my mind focusing on his words. Thank God she hadn't been sexually abused, it's the only positive thing to come out of it. We hadn't been too late after all but she'd gone through something traumatic before we could get there. Only she would know what it was.

"There's something else," the doctor says, and Damien gets up, standing beside me and looking intently at the doctor, his hands clenched into fists. I didn't miss the flash of relief in his eyes when the doctor said Winter hadn't been raped. I don't even want to know what the poor bastard is going through knowing his own friend had purchased his little sister as a whore.

"What is it?" I asked urgently and Damien nodded, his eyes staring directly into the doctor who was beginning to look a little uncomfortable.

"Her vocal cords were ripped apart by the attack" the doctor explained hesitantly, "as a shifter they may heal, but it will take months before she'll be able to speak again and that's only if they do heal. There is a chance that they are too damaged beyond repair and she'll be mute for the rest of her life."

I'm silent for a moment. It's a lot to take in, but my wolf and I don't care if she can't speak. There are other ways to talk with someone, but her brother looks absolutely devastated. He broke down in the car on the way here and I'm terrible at comforting people. I've always seen crying as a sign of weakness, but right now I can feel my own eyes beginning to well up.

"She can't speak" her brother whispers, sinking back onto the chair and putting his face in between his trembling hands. "Oh my god," he says, and then goes quiet once more.

"Is she awake?"

The doctor shook his head. "She's still recovering from the surgery. We patched up the gunshot wound and attempted to fix the vocal cord damage but there was nothing more we could do. It will be some hours if she wakes up" he explained kindly, and I sighed. There's no way I'm moving from this hospital until I can see for myself that she's alright. I have an overwhelming desire to be near her, to hold her in my arms and never let her go, and I know it's the mate bond strengthening rather than fading. Does she feel it on her end or is it just me? This was a mess.

"Can we see her?" Damien asked quietly, and I looked at the doctor, who looked a little weary.

"I'm not supposed to let you," he says, "but as an Alpha, you can command me and I will have to obey. So, there's no real point denying you is there," he says, and I grin.

"There really isn't" I agree and the doctor sighs and motions to both of us to follow him.

I walked down feeling trepidation. I've never liked hospitals; they always seem so cold and impersonal. Luckily, Winter's been put in a room close by and the doctor leaves us outside the door with a warning.

"Do not touch her, she's hooked up to machines at the moment. If she wakes, come get me or a nurse immediately" and we both nodded at him, understanding his concern. Poor Damien looks like he's about to break the door down and I thank the doctor as he leaves.

Damien opens the door and crashes inside while I follow. When I see Winter, I stop in my tracks and my mouth falls open in complete shock. She's pale, so pale and she's clad in a hospital gown. I could see a bandage

wrapped around her foot where she had been shot and there were bruises all over her face and arms and legs. There's an IV drip in her hand and another one monitoring her blood pressure.

"My god" Damien whispers, sinking down into a chair "she's just," he sounds helpless and I walk closer, my own heart seizing in pain. There's nothing of the girl I met the first time left. This is an empty shell of what she once was. I reached over to touch her hair, ignoring the doctor's warnings. It's matted, blood still in it, and I can smell it. I pull a chair over to the bed and sit there, unable to do anything but stare, my heart squeezing in my chest. Then I see her eyelids flutter. Is she waking up?