

CHAPTER 35

Damien POV

I've just gotten home and it's still dark inside, none of the lights having been turned on. I swear and turn on the kitchen light and go looking for Winter. The least she could have done was light up the house, especially since I can see rain clouds gathering and it's so dark inside the house that it's difficult to see clearly. But when I go upstairs there's no sign of her. Perhaps she's in the bathroom, I think, and go and check. Then I checked each room methodically, calling out her name. There's no sign of her anywhere and I feel dread rise from the pit of my stomach. Something is wrong, I just know it.

"Shit" I swear. So, she hadn't walked home by herself after all as I had assumed. What had happened then? I don't know why, but I began to search her room, in case she'd left some sort of sign about where she might have gone. I don't think Jessica and her cronies would have the guts to do anything to Winter, especially against Johnathon's wishes. I also know sometimes she likes to be alone. I'm not sure where, but every so often she'd slip out and come back hours later, a small smile on her face. Like her own personal haven that only she knew about. Her own little sanctuary, away from father and me.

I rifle through her desk and that's when I see the envelope, with my name written on it in neat cursive writing. My hand is shaking as I pull it out and I quickly rip the envelope open as I sit down on her bed. It's a letter addressed to me and, with my heart in my throat, I begin to read it.

Dear Damien

If you are reading this, then it means I've done what I planned to do and left. It's nothing against you, but I can't bear the thought of staying in this pack any longer. I've never truly felt like I belonged here anyway.

I'm afraid, every day Damien. Initially, it was because it was either you or our father taking your frustrations out on me, always looking over my shoulder, wondering which of you is going to hit me next, and what would I do to upset you. It has become the norm when it's anything but normal. You were my family and you both treated me like garbage. Instead of the daughter and sister that I was.

I know you're trying to make up for it all. You've started being the older, bigger, brother I always wanted, but it's too late. The pack hates me. I'm never safe, not even at school. The Luna and Alpha don't even know of my existence because of where we live and the students in the school love to bully me because they saw you bullying me at school.

I'm sorry for being such a coward and not telling you, but I was afraid you would try and stop me. I don't want to be stopped. I need to do this, Damien. I've wanted to leave ever since Johnathon rejected me straight away. I'm never going to find happiness while I live here, or even love. I want what our mother and father had before she died. They loved each other unconditionally and they were always affectionate in front of us. If father hadn't changed, maybe we would have stayed a happy family instead of being such a dysfunctional one.

I'm sorry that our mother died because of me, but it wasn't my fault, and honestly, you blamed me anyway. Damien, even when you hit me, or punished me, I still loved you. I've never stopped loving you as my brother. But I want a life for myself. I want to live in a pack that cares about me as a person and who accepts me for who I am. Where I can be myself without having to look over my shoulder or worry about being bullied as I walk down the halls of the school. Where I don't need you or Damien to keep watch over me while I attend class.

I need to be free, Damien. While I stay here, it's like I'm stuck in a cage, unable to be free and unable to leave. I know that losing my voice permanently has made things harder for both of us, but I'm willing to accept that I'll be mute forever. I'm not broken. I didn't need to be fixed, all I needed was the love of a brother, that was all. That was what you gave me Damien, and I'm so incredibly thankful for it.

Do me a favor. Take care of yourself and don't worry about me. Don't go looking for me. I've already made up my mind and you can't drag me back. Let me do this. Let me live again. When I find a place to call home, I'll send for you. I won't forget about you. But I need to take this time and travel and be independent instead of relying on other people. I need to find myself and discover what I want for once instead of people choosing for me. I need to get away from the memory of Thomas and what happened. I can't do that here.

I love you so much and I hope one day you'll forgive me for leaving you like this. But I couldn't bear to see your face if I told you. This just seemed the easier way.

I'll see you again one day.

Love your little sister, Winter xoxoxo

I crumpled the piece of paper in my fist. This was my fault. I'd driven my little sister away and God, it killed me inside to know it. She'd been having a hard time at school and at home because I had been so much like my father towards her. Now she'd run off to find another pack and part of me honestly couldn't blame her. I'm actually surprised she didn't go sooner. Life had been hell for her and it was partly due to me.

I debated going after her, but then I felt a sense of remorse and defeat. She'd said not to go after her, had written it implicitly, and who was I to go against her wishes? This one time, it felt like I needed to listen to what she wanted, not what I thought she should do. If she needed time to travel and to heal, that's what I should give her. It's the least she deserves and

she has every right to demand it. Even if I feel cold inside. Anything could happen to her out there but from the sounds of it, she was in more danger staying. It's the most difficult choice I've ever had to make, fighting the urge to go and find her, let alone dragging her back. She needed this. I had no right to make her even more miserable than she apparently already was.

I throw the piece of paper away and bury my face in my hands. I felt tears slowly trickle down my cheeks and I let them. I feel broken inside. I had just lost my baby sister who was God knows where, in one afternoon and I was partly to blame. So was Johnathon. Shit. I forgot about Johnathon. I glanced down at the discarded paper in trepidation. I was going to have to tell him about the letter and I knew, just knew, that it was not going to go down well with the big bad Alpha.