

## CHAPTER 36

Jonathan POV

I'm not going to lie; I'm fairly concerned about Winter. I mean, she could have at least waited for us to escort her home for heaven's sake. As it is, it's the next morning and I'm impatiently waiting by the gate to see her and that blasted annoying brother Damien of hers. Alright, maybe Damien's not that bad, but he is still annoying. There are other students trickling in and I ignore the looks, the curiosity on their stupid faces. I only have one person I'm interested in seeing and that's Winter. No one else. I ignore the small voice in my head that reminds me I rejected her and have no business being this protective towards her.

So, when Damien slowly comes trudging through the crowd, I'm puzzled to see he's all alone, instead of with his sister Winter. Had he left her at home? All by herself? I feel my anger rising and I shove through everyone, the others scattering out of my way. Good. Damien looks up and I swear he's been crying, his eyes are all red and puffy, and there are dried tear tracks on his cheeks. It's unnerving to see a young man as tough as him in such a mess. Had something happened to Winter? I began to feel a sense of panic. No, don't let it be that, let it be something else, anything else. Surely, I would have felt something through the mate bond by now? Or was the mate bond now that weak?

"We need to talk," Damien said in a low voice, and I grabbed his jumper and fairly dragged him into the school building and into an empty classroom, before releasing him.

"Talk" I snapped, crossing my arms and glowering at him "Where the hell is your sister Damien? Where is Winter?"

He hesitates and my eyes turn pitch black in warning as he gulps and looks away, too frightened to look me in the eyes. My impatience is mounting.

"She ran away" he finally said, and for a minute I stood there in disbelief, unable to comprehend it. He had to be joking. Winter was one of the most stubborn girls I've ever seen. She wouldn't have just left. I refuse to believe that. But a small part of me thinks that it's true.

"Explain" I boom as he flinches from the tone of my Alpha voice. He cringes as he sits in a chair, looking defeated and more than a little miserable.

"She left a note" he whispered, "saying that she couldn't bear to stay here any longer. I guess the bullying finally got to her", he explains, and I feel like throttling him. I knew Winter had been bullied but I'd believed the students had stopped when I put the word out. Had my wishes been disrespected? I'd kill anyone who dared touch her. I'd make it my personal mission to make their lives a living hell.

"I'll kill them" I declared, but Damien shook his head at me.

"It doesn't matter anymore" he exclaims, waving his arms around in his distress, "she's gone, Johnathon, and she's not coming back. Because of me" he hisses, "and father, she left, she wants to find a pack to call home", he sniffs, "because this one has only caused her suffering and misery."

I'm silent for a moment. I never realized just how much Winter was going through and how much I must have made it worse by trying to reject her. All I'd cared about had been myself and what I wanted.

"We have to find her," I said in desperation, and Damien began to laugh. It's almost like he's hysterical.

"She's long gone. I won't go against her wishes, not when this is what she wants. I've already done enough to destroy her, I won't take this away from her as well", he snaps, and I glower at him.

"You would leave your sister out there, alone, where anything could happen" I scoffed, and he shrugged, looking down at the floor.

"I would leave my sister out there to discover who she is and find a pack that loves her, a place that is a sanctuary to her, rather than try and drag her back and make her miserable again" he explains, and I look away, my jaw tight.

Why couldn't I have just been decent to the poor girl? I could have given her a chance before dragging her out of a classroom in front of other students and rejecting her. Of course, she would have been teased for that. Her life must have been hell and I'd added to it without even being aware of it. I feel a pang in my heart and my wolf is heartbroken. Our mate has abandoned us and I'm not stupid, I know there's every chance that she might come across a second chance mate in her travels if she went to various packs. That hurts and I feel cold at the thought.

"You shouldn't have rejected her," Damien tells me hollowly. "I think it was the last straw for her, you know. Like she wasn't worthy of being loved. I messed up big time but you, you were like the final nail in the coffin."

I exhale. He's not wrong. If she was already fed up with everything, then I'd clearly made her want to run away. I feel a sense of remorse and regret my actions, even if it's too little, too late. My wolf blocks me and I have to say that stings too. We're normally the best of friends, but not lately.

"I stuffed up but there's nothing I can do to change it now" I say, just as miserable. "For what it's worth, Damien, I am sorry", I offer, and the boy merely stares at me.

"What are you going to do now? You still have the mate bond but it's not going to do you any good now that she's gone", Damien points out, and I wince at his directness. This blasted mate bond. I am considering my options. I could go search for my mate and find her or I could do the right thing and let her go completely. My heart wants to find her, drag her back

kicking and screaming, but that would just be torture for her. I took a deep breath. Damien looks at me expectantly, my wolf sends me vibes of utter hatred. But this needs to be done. Winter deserves to be happy; she deserves to find someone who can give her all of their heart rather than a small part of it. She deserves to be cherished and adored and she deserves to feel safe. I'm not that person. I'm too indecisive and I constantly struggle with the idea of accepting her mate. Hopefully, her other one, should she find it, will accept her without question.

I took a deep breath. This is going to hurt far worse than anything I've ever faced. "I Johnathon of the blue moon pack fully reject Winter from the silver crescent pack as my mate, now and forever", I finished in a whisper. This time the pain is so bad; my legs buckle and Damien rushes to catch me. My entire chest is on fire and my heart is beating rapidly. Then, just as quickly, it fades away and I know this time, the mate bond is gone completely, that there's no small sliver left behind.

"It's done", I tell him regretfully "I got rid of it for real this time."

Damien looks slightly upset but gives a nod. "It's for the best", he says, and I agree, even if my heart continues to hurt at the loss of a mate.

Be free Winter and good luck finding another mate. I think to myself as the bell rings and I make my way to the classroom. I hope you find whatever it is you're searching for.