

CHAPTER 37

Winter POV

I don't know what it is that finally woke me, whether it's the throbbing headache I have or the strange burning sensation that's all over my body. It's intense and I swear it's getting worse as the seconds pass by. I slowly got up, putting a hand to my head and I glanced down to see that all of my stab wounds were fully healed. There's no pain whatsoever as I move and I stagger to the entrance of my little cave, peering outside and promptly swearing. Fuck. How long have I been out? Too long, I'm guessing.

The last thing I remember is it being past sunset and then nothing. But I suspect it's been more than a few hours since I passed out, not just because of my dry parched throat or growling stomach, but because it's a full moon outside. It's been more than a goddamn day and it's now my eighteenth birthday.

My legs buckle as the heat gets to excruciating levels, and my body is prone on the ground. I'm helpless to stop the pain, tears welling in my eyes as I pray for it to stop, feeling like I might be dying, it's that bad. No, I'm not being melodramatic. I scream as my left leg suddenly moves and breaks. It looks like I'm about to go through my first shift and all alone at that. I can't risk any wild animals hearing my screams in case it alerts them to my presence, so I whimper as my bones all begin to crack and break, adjusting themselves. It's the worst pain I've ever felt in my entire life and it seems like a lifetime. I'm panting heavily, not sure I'm going to make it without passing back out when suddenly the heat begins to subside and my bones stop moving. Is it over? I move everything experimentally and

then, slowly, get to my feet, looking down to see I have paws! Well, tiny paws anyway.

Hello Winter, I'm your wolf Sabriel.

I've never been so excited about hearing another voice.

I like the name Sabriel, it's beautiful, I tell her, and she gives a little laugh, sounding pleased. She seemed to like the compliment.

Winter is just as beautiful for a beautiful girl such as yourself.

Sabriel, I really want to see what we look like. Is it safe to go to the stream? We can look at our reflection.

Everything is scarily in focus and I can see so far in the distance it's like having my own personal binoculars attached to my face. I can smell so many different scents it's hard to tell what's coming from what, almost like I have to unravel each one to determine it.

It's safe to go to the stream. There are only small animals around and there are no humans or other shifters. We won't be in any danger.

It feels surreal walking on my paws and I'm tentative, my paws sinking into the hard dirt earth as I make my way towards the little stream nearby. Once I'm there, I peer into the water and see our reflection. I inhaled in shock.

We're beautiful Sabriel, I enthuse, looking at every single detail in awe. Our fur is silver but it shimmers and glistens, something I haven't seen before in other wolves. I'm silver all over except for my paws, which are white and just as shiny. Sabriel fairly preens at my compliments.

There's only one thing that concerns me and I'm hesitant to bring it up to Sabriel, but I have to know. We're smaller than most wolves. In fact, the only way to describe it is that we're a runt. There's no other polite way to say it. I hadn't been expecting that and I wonder why I'm so small. Is it

because I'm so malnourished or have something to do with all the abuse I've had to put up with over the years?

Sabriel, why are we so small? I thought we would at least be as big as the average wolf I asked and I sensed sadness emanating from her.

I'm a representation of you Winter. At the moment, we're small because that's how you feel. Once you've accepted yourself for who you are and believe in what you are capable of, you will grow. Being a runt doesn't make us any less powerful, she adds, and I give a small nod, although I'm disappointed. It was my fault we were so little and I can't help but feel slightly down about it.

Winter stop stressing about it. We are perfect no matter what.

I know it's just that...

Stop comparing us to other wolves! We are unique, beautiful and a hell of a lot smarter than most, she tells me and I snort, unable to help myself. My Wolf is sassy and has an outgoing personality, as opposed to my introverted one.

Now, how about we get this gorgeous body of ours moving and go for a run? You'll get tired after that, so I suggest spending one more night in the cave before we set off in search of a pack. What do you say?

Hell yes, I want to go for a run. I can't think of anything better. I start to run, my paws avoiding broken twigs and leaves, leaping over branches. The trees passed by in a blur and I let out a small howl, giving in to my wolf instincts. I smelled a deer nearby and followed it, tackling it to the ground. This is where it gets a bit gross and I start to eat it raw in my wolf form, my stomach so hungry that I've eaten a fair bit before I realize what I've done. My animal instincts had completely taken over and, without consciously trying, I let Sabriel take the driver's seat.

You did well, she compliments me and I grin and settle back to watch as she dashes through the trees towards the cave, stopping every so often to

sniff and track a scent. I'm not in a hurry to get back, this is too much fun, but eventually, we end up back at the beginning of our run and Sabriel reluctantly lets me have control again. This time I had no idea what to do.

Picture yourself as a human. From your hair color to your eyes, all the way down to your toes, Winter. Picture it clearly in your mind. Everything that makes you unique.

I form a picture in my mind, imagining myself, and hear my bones cracking and shifting. This time it's merely uncomfortable, thank goodness, instead of painful and in no time I'm in my human form and standing there. I shivered and looked down with a groan. I was completely naked. I'd shredded my clothes when I shifted. Damnit. I should have thought about that. Sabriel sounds calm.

You won't feel the cold so much now that you have a wolf. Go to sleep. When you wake up tomorrow, we'll go for a quick run and steal some clothes from someone's washing line or something. We'll work it out.

That sounded like a plan. I feel myself yawning even though I've spent a day unconscious and head towards the back of a cave. It's going to be uncomfortable, but right now my body needs to recover while I sleep. I closed my eyes.

Goodnight Sabriel.

Goodnight Winter.