

## CHAPTER 6

### Winter's POV

I don't know how much more of everything I can possibly take. Every day it's the same old story, the same boring routine and the bruises that never seem to fully heal, before they are taken over by new ones, either from my brother or my father, let alone the kids at school. I'm currently in the shower frantically trying to wash my hair due to the soda it took earlier during the day. It's so sticky and horrible, even smells slightly and I wrinkle my nose in disgust. At this rate, it might take another shower later to get it fully out of my hair. Or I'll have to cut it, something I flat out refuse to do no matter how long it takes to get this bloody stuff out.

Finally, I've done what I can to get rid of the sticky residue and I step out, stopping short as I see none other than my brother Damien sitting on my bed, looking amused at my terror. There's a broad smile on his face and I instantly tense when I see it. He holds up a book and I feel my heart sink. I've got so much homework already and he was going to add to it. I silently breathe and count to ten. Please don't hit me, I think to myself, I'm still hurting from earlier today. Maybe he'd leave me alone? Maybe there was something else he wanted, but I very much doubt it.

"Calm down" Damien says, sounding impatient even as I flinch, waiting for the inevitable slap or punch that was usually forth coming. To my

surprise, it didn't come. I start to relax even though I know that it's possible he'll still hit me.

"I just want to give you my homework" he says and tosses the book. I catch it awkwardly and he eyes my hand, the fingers having been bent back to straight but so painful it is all I can do not cry out in pain. He sees it and his eyes narrowed for a moment.

For a moment, there was silence and I see something flash in my brother's eyes. I blinked, astonished. Had I just seen concern in his gaze for a moment or was I hallucinating? Since when does he show even an ounce of concern when it comes to me? It's enough to shock me. He bites his lip as he gets up and ambles towards the doorway. I stand still, expecting him to just leave, or hit me but again he catches me by surprise.

"Word of warning" he mutters under his breath, my ears straining as I heard his words "father's downstairs and drinking again", he breathes, almost as though he's trying to warn me and I feel my heart skip a beat. Great, that's the last thing I need to deal with today, even though I'm used to it now. Then, just like that, he's gone. I'm astonished by his concern, but it's fleeting as I feel dread rise in my gut. There would only be one reason father is home this early and it's because he's either left work early or because, once again, he's lost his job. I suspected the latter. fuck.

I want to scream in frustration, bang my hands against the door and just give vent to the feelings I hide inside, but instead, I just bite my lips, so hard that I can taste blood before I venture downstairs to make dinner. I try to be as quiet as I can so that I don't draw any attention to myself. If

I'm lucky he might even be completely passed out. I actually pray that he is as I make my way towards the kitchen.

When Damien said father had been drinking he hadn't been kidding. Halfway down the stairs and I could smell the putrid scent of alcohol combined with his sweaty, disgusting body odor from never showering. It's actually a miracle that it's taken this long for him to lose whatever job he was currently doing. His hygiene is disgusting. The smell is disgusting and I shudder and try to tip toe down the steps. In times like these, when he drank worse than normal, it was best to be as quiet as possible, invisible if you can manage it. But he heard me and turned from the couch. I watched him get to his feet, staggering, a beer bottle in his hand, his eyes beady and puffy, red from his alcoholism, the scent of his unwashed body drifting over me. He has a small twisted smile on his face as he gets close, his breath stinking to high heaven as I try not to gag. I wait, feeling sick to my stomach and instinctively back away slightly, knowing that whatever is about to happen isn't going to be anything good. He's staring too hard at me to hope it's just my imagination. Then again, when was it anything nice, I think to myself sourly. I considered making a run for the door but that would only delay the inevitable and I would have to go home eventually, face the music, and by then Damien would most likely join in my punishment. I brace myself and hope that whatever is coming will be over quickly and I can get to cooking dinner, my stomach growling loudly in hunger. Maybe he'll just throw insults at me if he's too drunk to hit me accurately.

"Well, well, well if it isn't the little murderer" he says in a slurred voice and I flinch instinctively while he gives a derisive laugh. He's clearly drunk, so many beer bottles scattered around the floor that even I'm astonished. It's a lot more than his usual amount. How long has he been drinking while I've been upstairs? I said nothing, knowing that it was best

not to provoke him any further. That will just make him even angrier than he already is. He waves the beer bottle threateningly in my face and I hesitantly take a step back. It was still half full of liquid and heavy in his hand, not that he appeared to notice, too busy studying me with pure hatred in his eyes. I'm not a murderer. I chant silently to myself, but it's so quiet, almost as if I'm starting to believe I am, I've been told it so many times. I'm so used to his hatred and contempt that I don't even react to it. Then he swings his hand high up in the air and I try to move, try to run, but he grabs me by the hair and pulls until I stand still, my eyes closed, tears dripping down my cheeks. I feel nothing but a sharp pain in the top of my head before everything turns to darkness and I no longer know if I'm dead or alive. Right now, being dead would be considered a blessing.