

CHAPTER 7

Damien POV

I don't know what's come over me lately, but I'm no longer enjoying the cruelty I usually show to my younger sister Winter. There's just something about the way that she stares at me, so much pain in her gaze, that I feel a flash of guilt. If our mother was still alive, then Winter would still be happy and a go lucky child or teenager, but instead she's grown up in a house full of abuse. I never used to mind, but lately it has been weighing heavily on my conscience. My mother would be upset to see the way that father and I treat her. She loved Winter so much. Died protecting her little girl. I sigh.

I guess that's why I warned her about our father being on the warpath. Normaly I wouldn't, but today I felt like I needed to. The drunken old man had gotten himself fired again, but I guess that's what happens when you constantly turn up to work either drunk or severely hungover. I've lost count of how many jobs he's been fired from. It's quite pathetic really. I know that he misses mum but surely he needs to move on at some stage? The last time I suggested that though, he turned on me and I'm not planning on trying to get him to move on anytime soon.

Something seems wrong, my stomach churning and nausea coming to the surface and, for whatever reason, I can't get rid of a niggling feeling in my gut, turning to my friends and blowing them off as they protest.

Whatever this feeling is, I sense I need to go home. They can deal without me for one night, for heaven's sake. It's not like they don't see me at school every day. Well, at least on the days I bother to go. I rush back to the house but don't run. The entire time I try to convince myself that everything is fine and that I'm just overreacting. After all, my gut could be wrong, couldn't it? I didn't even like facing my father when he was on a complete bender.

The house is quiet, too quiet as I let myself in, my father snoring wildly in the recliner, a beer bottle loosely clutched in his hand. Where was Winter? Dread rises up inside of me. Normally, she would already be in the kitchen cleaning up after dinner, but I couldn't see her from my position. Nor could I sense her anywhere, but I could smell the disgusting metallic scent of blood in the air and my heart sinks. I know instinctively that it's Winters because father is not bleeding from any wounds that I can see. I went round the corner and stopped, absolutely horrified, all the blood draining out of my face. I can't believe my eyes and I force the bile down that tries to rise in my throat.

Winter is lying there on the cold hard ground and she looks like a rag doll, both of her eyes closed, completely unconscious. There is red blood pooling around her head and I can see it's change of color, some of it old. How long had she been lying there like that for? God, what had father done? This was the first time I'd seen her in such a bad state. Something occurs to me and I bend down and wrinkle my nose at the smell of her blood, relieved to see her chest rising and falling. She was breathing at least and had a pulse even if it seemed a little weaker than normal. I feel a small sprinkle of relief.

“What have you done, old man” I say grimly, bending to pick her up, feeling her head draped against me and, for some inexplicable reason, I find myself feeling protective of her. I shake the feeling off. I can’t afford to be merciful towards her, no matter how much I was softening. She was the reason for our mother being dead and that I couldn’t forgive, no matter how much she begged me to. But was she, I thought? What if she was telling the truth? I had no reason to doubt her story, even though my father was certain that Winter had somehow caused our mother’s death. But Winter had only been a child at the time, hardly capable of what our father says she is, and I shake my head, trying hard to clear the dozens of thoughts now flooding my mind.

I took her to her room. I can see part of her wound is healing and know that though it will be slow, by tomorrow she’ll be fine as though it has never happened. I doubt she would ever forget the memory though, and I feel a tiny bit of grief at that thought. Another unhappy memory to hold onto, the poor thing has very few happy ones. I lay her in her bed and gingerly placed her blanket over the top of her, pausing for a moment as I pondered what to do. Was it safe to leave her in that kind of condition? Would father stay away or did I need to lock the door? I sigh. Father’s too drunk to do anything more to Winter and I doubt he was capable, anyway, in his condition. Poor Winter’s body had seen worse than this and she’d survived. Something I wasn’t exactly proud of. Besides, I couldn’t risk being seen in her room helping her. Father would take all of his anger out on me if I did.

She can sleep it off, I tell myself, backing away from the door and refusing to look at her face, how innocent my little sister looked when she slept. How vulnerable she suddenly seemed. She’ll be fine, she always is.

Always will be. The last thing she needs is the brother who torments her staying in her room. I leave without a backward glance, going to my own room. I guess I'll have to do my own homework tonight, I think a tad bit absently, my mind still on Winter's injuries and how broken she seemed.