

## CHAPTER 8

### Winter POV

God, my head is pounding like you wouldn't believe. I force myself to open my eyes, my throat feeling sore and completely dry as I lick my chapped lips, confused and disorientated. Where was I, I wondered, looking around the room, realizing it was mine. But how had I gotten here? I distinctly remember being hit on the head by father downstairs and then nothing. I was certain I had fallen unconscious from the pain in my head. So who had put me to bed? I doubted it was father, but it was equally astonishing to think my brother Damien would show that much care towards me. But he was the only one who could have possibly done it and I feel a small bit of gratefulness towards him.

I force myself to roll out of bed, blinking against the bright sunlight and trying not to scream at the pain in my head. I feel the back of my hair and can tell it's matted with dried blood and I groan, it's going to take forever to get it all out and I'm hoping I won't have to do something horrible like cut it. It's taken forever for me to grow it as long as this. I hurry to the bathroom and am ecstatic to find I'm able to wash it out with a bit of elbow grease, my hand now fully healed along with my head injury. It's the small things in life I think to myself sourly, to be grateful for.

I take my time and tiptoe downstairs, disgusted by the mess that greets me. There are dishes piled everywhere and dozens of empty beer bottles

scattered all over the lounge room floor. Thankfully, father is snoring loudly in the chair, possibly still drunk judging by the smell of him, and I take the opportunity to make breakfast, putting his on the table. There's no way I'm going to wake him up and face his wrath when I have school to get to. For the first time, I almost inhaled my bacon and egg sandwich, no sign of my brother anywhere and I assume he's gone to school already. Good riddance, I couldn't have been happier this morning. I leave his breakfast out in case and grab my school bag. So far it's been a non-eventful morning and part of me feels hopeful that it will continue, walking to school uninterrupted by anyone for the first time in months, and I can't believe my good fortune. What was going on? Had the moon goddess taken pity on me?

A group of cheerleaders are gathered in the hall and I instinctively duck my head down and try to cover it with my long hair as I inch past them all. I can hear their conversation clearly and to my shock no one noticed me as I went past. Too busy with their conversation or possibly gossip. Whatever, as long as it has nothing to do with me, I could care less.

“Can you believe there's a new kid at school today?”

“That's not all, guess what?”

“I heard he's an Alpha”, Jessica speaks up and I flinch, still working on getting past them without being caught. I catch her tossing her hair over her shoulder, a massive smile on her face. “I just know that he's going to be my mate, it's obvious” she almost purrs while her friends look a bit put out. Trouble in paradise, I think to myself smugly. Looks like her friends also want a piece of this poor Alpha kid.

“What if you’re not though,” another one dares to question her and falls silent at the scorching look on her face.

“He’ll still want me” she said smugly, “after all, I’m the most beautiful girl in the school. We don’t always have to agree to be with mates, we can choose to mark each other.” I almost scoff at her blatant display of confidence. Mates are meant to be together forever and I wonder why she thinks just being beautiful will be enough to get his interest. Were male werewolves really that shallow? Well she could have him. I doubt with the way I look that I’ll even get a glance from him and that’s perfectly fine with me. I prefer to be invisible rather than have attention on me.

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The other girls begin to chat excitedly amongst themselves and I make it to my locker without incident, grabbing the books I need. My heart sinks a little. With what happened last night, I wasn’t able to complete my homework and I feared what the teacher might say. It wasn’t exactly my fault, but it still hurt nonetheless. I hated to let my teachers down. Unless it was beyond my control, like last night when I was unconscious, I passed it in every day without fail and I knew my grades could take a hit and it was all because of what my father had done to me last night. Damn him, I think bitterly as I begin to make my way to my algebra class, feeling angry and full of hatred at the man who was no longer a real father to me.

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I find myself wondering about this so-called new boy that has everyone so excited. Like we haven't seen an Alpha before. Then again there were no other Alpha's at this school. Most tend to go to private ones over public, I guess because of their status as leaders of their packs. Would this Alpha be kind or would he be like the rest of the school and torment me along with them? Or would he keep away from me? Because being bullied by regular shifters is bad, I don't really want to find out how much worse the bullying can get when an Alpha decides to join in as well.