

Chapter 11 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

I started the next morning with a big smile on my face. Last night had been so much fun, laughing and joking with my brother, actually reminiscing about mum without him getting angry at me. I get dressed and rush downstairs, stopping in my tracks as I spot my father waiting for me. I glance upwards hoping to see Damien but there's no sign of him and I hesitate, wondering if I should call out for help. But it was also possible that Damien had left for school already, in which case, I was on my own anyway.

My father's beady little eyes rest on me and I flinch, smelling his breath and the beer from there. It's repulsive, almost as though he's bathed in it. I stop on the steps, too frightened to make a move, but to my surprise, my father gives me a smile that instantly makes me suspicious. Why was he suddenly in a good mood? Had he maybe gotten another job already? Normally it took him weeks though. Even then, he never smiled at me. My stomach churns with dread.

"Winter," my father says heartily, and I eye him suspiciously.

"Yes," I said quietly, my feet still firmly rooted to the ground, my body beginning to tremble in fear. Something was up. He was acting too strangely for my liking.

"You look pale," he says, and I place a hand on my cheek. It's true that I'm pale, but then, other than walking to school and back, I don't really see much sunlight. So being pale was normal for me, not that he'd notice, of course. Or it could be because it felt like all the blood had drained out of my face the second I saw he was home.

He comes closer and I instinctively flinch, raising my arm as though to shield off a hit that I suspect was coming. Instead, nothing happens and I place my arm back down, to see a wounded expression on my father's face.

"I wasn't going to hurt you," he says quietly, and I want so badly to believe him, but nothing on this god-green earth would ever get me to believe my asshole of a father. Instead, all I can wonder is what he wants. He's never acted this civil to me ever and, if anything, I'm even warier of him than before.

"Come down already," he says slightly irritably and I exhale, cautiously moving one foot in front of the other, reluctantly making my way down to the foot of the stairs, my heart thudding loudly and quickly in my chest. I wish Damien had been here, at least then he'd probably fill me in on what was happening.

"Kitchen," my father said and I almost gagged as I smelled his breath, saying nothing and walking into the kitchen. I assume that he wants me to prepare breakfast, but to my surprise, he places his hands on my shoulders and forces me to sit at the dining table.

"I'll make us some toast," he says jovially "coffee?" he asks, and I'm stunned. Had father had a change of mind and decided he was going to stop abusing me? What had brought this on? Was I dreaming?

"Yes please" I mumble and he nods, brusquely making one up as I stare down at the table. I feel uncomfortable, awkward even. This is the most I've ever spoken to him in who knows how long and I'm not quite sure what to say.

When he places the toast and coffee in front of me, I inhale deeply, appreciating the strong aroma, giving father a tentative smile as he joins me.

"Thank you" I whisper and he nods, biting into his toast. I take a small nibble of mine, feeling emotional. He'd put peanut butter on it but he'd cut it into triangles, the way I'd liked to eat it when mother was still alive.

"So I was thinking," he says gruffly, staring at his coffee, "that maybe today it would be a good idea if you stayed home. You look sickly anyway," he adds.

I'm confused. I've never missed a day of school in my life. Not only that, but I felt fine, I wasn't sick at all. I shake my head.

"I can't miss school" I protested thickly, taking a sip of my coffee "I can't afford to miss any classes" I added tensely, waiting for him to explode. Instead, he just regards me calmly, still drinking, and I pick up my own cup and continue to sip while I wait.

I blink. Was it my imagination or was father looking slightly fuzzy? I shake my head, putting it down to tiredness, my body feeling relaxed. My father looks calm. "I'm afraid the school isn't expecting you," he tells me firmly, shaking his own head "I've already called to advise them you're sick and won't be in for the rest of the week", he adds.

I'm shocked. "Why would you do that," I say slowly, my mouth beginning to feel dry.

"Well, you're needed elsewhere," he says quietly, and my jaw drops open. I make an attempt to stand but it's like my limbs refuse to cooperate with me and I stare at my father, realizing that he's laced my drink with some sort of drug. It's the only explanation I can think of as the room starts to spin around me.

"Why" I managed to utter as he came over to me, my body sliding out of the chair onto the ground. I blink tears from my eyes. How stupid of me to even trust my father for a moment. I should have instantly known something was up. But why had he drugged me?

"You see," my father says, coming into view, a large grin on his fat, puffy, face. "I'm in desperate need of money and last night I was given an offer I just couldn't pass up."

"What" I mumble, trying to scrabble at the tiles, and get a grip on anything that might make my body move. I pray for Damien to magically come home, but it's futile. I scream as I feel his foot on my back, squishing me and making it impossible to attempt to move. "Well, it came to me that you're a very pretty girl", my father says, and I feel my heart skip a beat. Surely he's not about to? Not to his own daughter!

"You can make me a lot of money," he says gruffly, "and I owe someone money, so it's a win-win for me."

He chuckles and I open my mouth but nothing comes out, my voice merely a croak. I feel defeated. There's no getting out of this situation and all I can do is lie there completely helpless, my whole body paralyzed and my vision slowly beginning to diminish as blackness began to creep in.

"I suppose it's only fair to tell you where you are going, Winter" he chuckled, and I felt nothing but hatred towards him. If I could have killed him right then and there, I would have. As it was, I wished I could kick him in the nuts. He leans down and bends close to my ears, his stubble tickling my face as I feel the bile rise up in my throat, dreading what he's about to say or tell me.

"I've sold you" he growls, satisfaction in his voice "to someone who wants to have a lot of fun with you, and when he's done" he threatens, "then I'll sell you

gain. You are useless, worthless, the only thing your good for is being a whore and now I've made you one."

I wish I could scream, yell, anything, but as he moves off of me, the darkness creeps in and I lose whatever hold I have on keeping myself awake, my eyes closing against my will, my breathing beginning to even out and to my horror, there's now only darkness as I fall unconscious right there on the kitchen floor.

Chapter 12 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

It's just a dream, it's just a dream, I chanted to myself in my head, forcing my eyes, which feel really gritty, open, only to see nothing more than darkness surrounding me. Wherever I am, there's not much light to see. My head is fucking throbbing and I wince as I try to move my arms and legs to no avail. Something was chaffing and I looked down to see that I was firmly tied to a chair, my legs tied to the legs and my arms behind me. I swear, but it's muffled by the gag that's been shoved in my mouth and tied around my head.

"Mmmf" I cry out, but there's no answer and my eyes scan whatever the hell this room is for any sign of escape. It appears to be a basement of some sort, the floor a hard concrete, various pieces of furniture in states of decay. The air smells disgusting and moldy and I try not to inhale too much. There's nothing that I can use to free myself and I feel sick to my stomach.

Even on the saddest of days, I had never once thought my father was capable of selling me to someone for money. I thought maybe, in the smallest bit of his heart, he might have actually given some sort of damn about me. How naive was I? He'd never forgiven me for mother's death and if he wanted to destroy any love I might have had for him, this was the way to do it. I shove frantically at the chair, scraping it across the floor, and curse at the noise it makes. Maybe there's something in one of the drawers of the various furniture that might have something useful.

But as I'm moving, something catches the corner of my eye and I whip my head around and begin to feel a rising sense of panic. There's a bed in the room, something that might be unremarkable considering all of the other bits of furniture in the basement, but it's almost new, and it's made up. Why would a bed be made up in the basement? There was only one answer that came to mind and it wasn't a good one. I need to get out of here and god I need to do it quickly. There was no telling when whoever had bought me would come back.

I scrape the chair as I sort of drag it with my body, careful not to tip over and fall. It makes a racket, but I'm past the point of caring. My only focus is getting out of here before it's too late. I can't count on anyone to save me. The desk I make it to is empty, or at least it feels like that, it's kinda difficult to see properly and feel with hands that don't have much give. I wonder about using the corner of the desk to rub the ropes against, but it would take forever, and even attempting to undo the knots isn't working.

I try to scream for help but the gag just muffles everything I try and my lungs get full of dust which makes me heave and cough. I'm terrified. I'm all alone and I don't know if I'm even in the same town, let alone if I'm close to the pack house. I don't even know how long I've been out for. What if I was taken to a different town? Would my brother Damien come looking for me or would father lie to him? Probably the latter.

I feel tears well up in my eyes and I break down crying, sniveling as I wait for the inevitable. I know what the person who bought me plans to do to me and it's the last way I imagined losing my innocence. Bile rises in my throat. Finally, there was only one other thing I could think of, and with my eyes scrunched closed so I couldn't talk my way out of it, I tipped myself sideways and let the chair fall, hoping that it might make it easier to get out of my restraints.

Success. The ropes seem to be slightly looser and I wiggle and pull and tug as hard as I can to try to undo the knots. I feel the tiniest bit of hope as they begin to get slack. Way to go Winter, I cheer myself on, ignoring the chafing on my wrists and the feeling of my skin peeling off as I tug at the ropes. I can deal with the pain later. Right now I was focused on getting these damn ropes off and then untying my legs.

I groan as the ropes come off and wriggle my wrists around as the blood begins to circulate again. God it hurts, it's excruciating as the numbness fades and the pain begins. I reach around, my shoulders protesting, and begin to untie my ankles, which are just as tight and just as annoying to get undone. Sitting doesn't make it easier, and I'm forced to stay lying down as I tug and pull, swearing to myself. I take the gag off and am about to call out for help when I stop. If I called out, he, whoever he was, would hear me. For all I knew, he was upstairs waiting for me to wake up. So I keep silent and the ropes begin to slacken and then finally pull off, leaving me free to get to my feet, which are full of pins and needles.

I can't believe I've done it. I searched the room for any windows or doors besides the exit and found none. There's only one way out of this room and

that's to go up. A weapon would be useful, but I'm not about to waste time searching. I start to climb the stairs, clutching the banister for support as I make my way up, placing my feet as lightly as possible and praying they don't creak. The door is unlocked and after debating with myself, I slowly turn the handle and poke my head out. There's no one waiting on the other side and I begin to creep out, closing the door gently behind me.

I'm in some sort of mansion, the rooms are huge and I can see the front door, my excitement rising. In fact, I'm so damn excited that I threw away any sense of caution in my mad dash to get to the door. However, before I can put my hand on the doorknob, I hear a strange clicking sound behind me, one that makes my whole body go tense and still. I would know that noise anywhere. It was the clicking sound of a gun and I had no doubt it was aimed at me. I stopped instantly, letting my hand drop down to my side.

"Turn around" the voice growls and I frown. It sounds oddly familiar to me, as though I know the person it belongs to. I turn, slowly, petrified of who I'm going to come face to face with, and when I do, it's all I can do not to scream, astonished at the person who would be my ruination.

Chapter 13 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

"Thomas" I breathed, staring at him incredulously, unable to believe my own eyes. I knew this boy and had met him on more than several occasions. He was one of my brother's best friends and also took pervading pleasure in humiliating and tormenting me. Don't tell me he's the one who bought me. Not one of my brother's friends. Surely he wouldn't betray my brother, or did he think by doing this he was helping him in some sick way to take revenge on me?

My eyes never leave the gun that's being held firmly in his hand, pointed directly at my head. One wrong move and I was frightened he'd shoot my head off.

He laughs. "Oh, Winter, you should see your face" he scoffs, looking highly amused.

"It's just a prank then? You'll let me go", I said hopefully, and he shook his head, his eyes turning pitch black for a moment.

"No," he says adamantly, and I shrink back at the vehemence in his voice. "You see I've always liked you, Winter. I know I tease you and hurt you, but that's so that your brother keeps inviting me around to be close to you."

I feel nauseous. He could care less about my brother, he was only friends with him to get to me!

"Imagine my surprise" he continues, his eyes narrowing on me "when I heard your father offering your services for a night of ahem", he coughs "pleasure with a virgin," he says, and I feel myself turning bright red with embarrassment.

"Well you wouldn't believe how many people were interested," he tells me disgustedly, and I wanted to scream at him that he was just as repulsive. If he didn't have the gun trained on me, I would have, instead, I had to bite my lip and keep my silence.

"In the end, it was down to the highest bidder, which happened to be me. Isn't it great my parents are rich" he says gleefully, and I say nothing, feeling numb, as though I'm not even in my body right now but floating and looking down.

"Look at it this way, Winter," he said urgently, "at least I'll be gentle, not like the other men who would have bought you. Isn't that better?"

I tremble. No, it's not better because I want to hold onto my virginity for my future mate and husband. But what do you say to a psychopath with a gun? I wanted to live, not die right now.

He waves the gun and I flinch. "Walk towards me", he orders, and trembling, I walk on unsteady feet towards him, his hand coming out and gripping the back of my shirt as he shoves me in front of him.

"I don't know how you got out of your restraints" he mutters as he pushes me towards the basement "but I guess it doesn't really matter right now, does it?"

I can feel his breath on my neck, his hand squeezing my shirt, and the hard barrel of the gun against my back. I was trembling, terrified, and wanting so badly to run that it took all my courage to go back into the room I'd escaped from.

I take the stairs as slowly as I can and he keeps his grip on me. I contemplated taking him by surprise, but he's got the gun too close to me, so it's too much of a risk.

"See that bed" he growls, and I go completely cold "go and sit on it. "

I want to scream, to cry, beg him not to do this, but my voice fails me and I follow his instructions, sitting on the bed with tears flowing down my cheeks.

"Don't cry Winter" he murmurs and I stay still as he wipes the tears away with one hand. What did he expect me to do, jump for fucking joy? Idiot.

"Don't move or I swear I'll shoot you in the leg and then have fun" he snaps, and I give a hasty nod, staring at the ground as he disappears. I could run for it but his threat was genuine and, quite frankly, being shot wasn't something I wanted to have to deal with on top of what he was about to do.

He almost dances down the stairs, clutching something tightly in his hands. I eye it curiously and catch it as he throws it at me. "I want you to put it on," he says gruffly, and my heart sinks as I unroll the fabric. It's so sheer it's see-through, a white baby doll with matching panties. I swallow hard. It looks like something someone would wear on their wedding night and I can see how lustful his gaze is as he motions for me to do what he said.

"Turn your back" I pleaded, but he shook his head, looking stony.

"No chance" he scoffs, raising the gun again.

"Please."

"Get dressed" he roars and I flinch, hurriedly standing up and, with shaking hands, take off my clothes until I'm completely naked in front of him.

"Good girl" he whispers, and I say nothing, fumbling around with the baby doll while he just stands there. I saw him out of the corner of my eye and I swear I wanted to vomit right then and there. He's stroking himself while he's watching me, his pants unzipped, his penis fully out. He never takes his eyes off me.

I finally get the blasted baby doll on and the panties and he tells me to lie down, something I'm extremely reluctant to do. He cocks the gun and I crawl onto the bed, lying down with my face upwards, sobbing wildly as I feel his

hand begin to stroke my leg. His touch is repulsive, his hand clammy and it's all I can do not to drive my leg upwards.

"Relax, Winter" he tried to tell me, as though trying to soothe me, "I'll make it good for you, I promise."

"Thomas, if you care about me at all, you won't do this", I pleaded, and for a moment something flashed across his eyes and just as quickly it was gone.

"You're mine, Winter, no one else, and after this, no one will ever want you as their mate" he growls, and I wonder if he actually believes that. Because if a mate loves you, it won't matter about your past and what happened. But maybe he didn't think of it like that or in that way. Because there was no way I'd stay with him just because he was taking what wasn't his, to begin with. He could go to hell.

"I'm going to put the gun down," he tells me, and I start to relax, thinking that maybe I can take advantage of that, but something makes him pause for a moment and I see remorse in his eyes.

"I don't trust you" he whispers, and before I can stop him, he puts the gun to my foot and pulls the trigger as I scream.

Chapter 14 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

I've never felt such pain as when the bullet pierced my skin. I heard a clang and knew it had gone all the way through, but my god, the blood, my stomach churning, my screams all pierced the room and I saw Thomas's face change. Why was he looking so fucking pale when the bastard had just shot me?

"Shhh Winter" he soothes, racing off and fetching a towel while I continue to shriek at the top of my lungs. When he came back, he wrapped it and looked at me, contrite. "I wanted to make sure you couldn't run off", he whispered, and I glared at him.

"Well you succeeded" I screamed, my voice hoarse "it hurts", I sobbed. Yes, I know I sounded like a coward, but you try getting shot and see how pleasant it feels. I get some satisfaction that there are blood droplets on the damn baby doll.

"There," he says soothingly and I can't help but notice he's put the gun down as he comes over and sits beside me, wiping my tears away with his thumb. I swallow, my eyes beseeching him to stop, in so much pain I'm trying not to vomit, even as I miserably notice that the blood has started to stop trickling. Every single movement of my foot or leg brings utter agony and there's no way I'm making it off this bed anytime soon.

"All better," he says, and I scowl at him. Is he serious? Does he think just because I have shifter blood, that the injury, bloody heals in minutes?

"No" I shriek, "not all better you bastard", I scream, and before I can so much as blink, his arm swings back and hits me directly in the face as I cower underneath him.

"Enough" he growls and I stiffen, forcing myself to hold back more screams, barely able to see through my eyes, they were filled with tears. I saw him bend down and then I felt bile rise up in my throat as he kissed me, his lips harsh against mine, one of his hands twining around to the back of my head and in my hair as he pushed against me. I struggle, but am no match, not with how weak I feel and as he demands access with his tongue, I'm forced to open my mouth to him. His tongue touches mine and it's all I can do not to gag, it's that slimy feeling, and I'm getting no pleasure from the way it seems like he's licking my own. I heave a big sigh of relief when he finally pulls away and begin to breathe fresh air into my lungs.

"You taste so sweet" Thomas whispers and I shudder, watching as he begins to undress himself, my eyes looking away as he slowly peels his shirt off, kicking his unzipped pants and underwear down onto the floor. I don't want to see it, but it's like my eyes have a mind of their own and I gulp as I see his erection. He's big, wide and I can't envision anything like that fitting inside of me, not without me screaming underneath him.

"Please" I whispered, feeling numb inside. I know he's not going to stop, not when he's gone this far. He smirks at me as he slowly climbs onto the bed, my foot still uselessly lying still.

"Don't worry" he whispers into my ear as I stare dully at the ceiling "I promised to make it good for you, remember. It's your first time and I want you to remember it forever", he finished, and I wanted to laugh, feeling hysterical. Oh, I would remember this forever, but not in the way that he meant.

His fingers creep under my baby doll and I tense, feeling his hands against my breasts, squeezing them roughly. I cried out and he kissed me, stopping me from crying out anymore, and then he moved, kissing the nape of my neck, one hand effectively strangling me as he did. I want more than anything to pretend I'm somewhere else, that this isn't happening to me and that this is all a dream, but in reality, it's a nightmare come to life.

His fingers move down to my panties and I gulp, feeling his hands roughly grip them, pulling them down my legs. He gets gentler as he remembers the pain in my foot and gently slides them off, a broad smile on his face. "You're so lovely Winter, so beautiful," he says, his eyes glazed and I wonder if he's pretending that this is somewhere else, that I'm not screaming in his fantasy because that's what it was to him, pure fantasy. No way in hell had I ever shown an ounce of liking for Thomas and for him to be like this wasn't something I had ever thought would happen.

I need to do something because he's already licking his lips and staring down at my pussy. I force myself to grab his arm, my eyes looking directly into his. "Thomas" I moan feeling disgusted, in myself "I want you so badly" I lay it on thick and it works because he starts to stroke himself, making his cock even more engorged as I try not to stare down at it.

"Give me a moment" he grunts and I shake my head slowly at him, watching as he looks at me confused.

"We need protection" I, panted out "I don't want to get pregnant and I don't think your ready to be a father yet, are you?" I clung to hope. Please say you don't want to, please say you don't want to, I chant in my mind.

He cocks his head to the side, a thoughtful expression on his face. "If I get pregnant we won't be able to do this again," I say weakly, and he narrows his eyes. I hope this is enough to persuade him. "I have a condom in my wallet" he mutters and reluctantly peels himself off me, giving me a small smile. He really is idiotic or just gullible. Either way, I don't care if it works to my advantage.

"Don't move" he warns, and then glances over at my foot with a sigh "not that I think you can", he adds, and I give a small nod. He hesitates and then slowly moves towards the staircase, backing up with his eyes fixed on mine. I try to keep myself looking innocent, my breathing shallow, watching as he gets closer to the doorway. I know his wallet's in a bowl by the front door and that

he can be there and back within mere minutes, but it might just be enough, that is so long as he doesn't remember.

The door opens and for a moment he stands there as though debating and then rushes out. I wasted no time, hopping onto both legs and swearing profusely under my breath as pain ricocheted through my leg, stumbling towards the place he'd left the gun. The idiot had completely forgotten he'd put it down or he'd underestimated my ability to move. I'd sooner cut my leg off than let the son of a bitch touch me anymore and my hand closes around the handle as I check the safety. Now I hold the key to getting out of here firmly in my hands and there is no doubt in my mind that I'm about to use it.

Chapter 15 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

The gun is heavy in my hand and it shakes slightly, but I'm not loosening my grip. Thomas will be back any moment and I know I need to take him by surprise. I can't fight in my condition and I stumble towards the stairs, quickly getting under them before he comes back. Naturally, I hear the door creak back open seconds later and his footsteps as he comes in. It only takes him less than a minute to realize I'm gone.

"Winter" he yells, and I stay silent, breathing heavily in the darkness, trying not to give my location away. There are plenty of hiding spots in the basement and I hope he thinks I'm hiding somewhere, anywhere else.

"This is stupid," he says, annoyed, "you can barely walk on that leg. You really think you have the guts to shoot me" he scoffs and begins to walk down, looking tentatively around him, looking for me.

Come on, I thought to myself, just a little further down. He stops just above me and I strike, darting both hands out and shoving him. To my satisfaction, he loses his balance and goes tumbling down the stairs. He doesn't move. I wait, seeing his chest moving evenly but his eyes are closed and I pray that he's lost consciousness because now I have to climb over him to get to the stairs and out of there. The gun shook in my hand as I went out, pointing it directly at him. I'm taking no chances.

I limped, swearing, over to him and kneeled down slightly to check his pulse. It's steady but he doesn't react to my touch and I slowly move my good leg over him, gripping the banister tightly as I swing my painful one over his body

and up the first step. I pant, it hurts so damn much, but I can't afford to slow down. Part of me wants to shoot Thomas in the face while he lies there, but I can't bring myself to be a killer, despite everything. Besides, it feels really wrong to kill a boy while he's lying there helpless and completely naked. I spare a thought for the fact I'm still wearing a baby doll with no underwear, but shrug it off. Who cared? Right now I needed to get out. Clothes could wait till later, screw modesty.

I had not even gotten halfway up when I heard him move. I froze and looked over my shoulder, seeing his arm beginning to move, started to almost jump each step, desperate to get out the door. I limp towards the front door, the gun still in my hand, hoping that he's still not up, still in too much pain to move. I forgot that he already had his wolf and would heal quickly. He tackles me to the floor and I scream in rage, a red-hot pain in my foot as I fall, the gun sliding out of my hands.

His eyes are crazed as he turns me over, his face stony and his hands reaching to strangle me.

"You little bitch" he hissed "I was trying to be nice to you and you pulled that? You only have yourself to blame" he adds, and I back up a little as he laughs, his fingers closing around my throat while I scrabble and claw at his hands, trying desperately to get them off me.

"Stop", I got out, but if anything, his hands got tighter. "I'm sorry". I pant, but he doesn't stop, a crazy expression on his face.

"All I wanted was for both of us to be together" he shouted, banging my head on the floor over and over until blood began to trickle from my head.

While it was excruciating, the sight of blood seemed to snap him out of it and slowly his hands slid off of me, sitting back but stupidly, it must be said, with his knees over mine. I tense. There's only one way he's getting up and it's something I'm about to take advantage of. I might be down and I might be in pain, but so help me if I'm about to die today, I'm taking the asshole with me. Sure enough, he stands to get up and I bite down on my lip to prevent myself from screaming as I shoot out my good leg, effectively kicking him in the place it hurts the most. I hear his howl and watch as he keels over on the floor, gripping his nuts, while I slide out from under him and turn onto my side, inching towards the gun which is close by, my hand reaching out for it.

I can hear his growling behind me and don't risk looking back as my hands grip the gun and I turn, just as he tackles me, his claws digging into my throat. I can feel them, it's almost like he's severing my vocal cords and I don't hesitate any longer, my hand instinctively bringing itself up as I shoot him, over and over until the chamber's empty, his body going slack over mine, blood dripping all over me.

He slumps and I curse at how heavy he is as I push him off. What a deadweight. This time I want to make sure he's dead and, wincing, I slowly pull his claws out of my throat, gripping them frantically and making sure to stem the bleeding as I literally use my good leg to kick him off me. I can barely breathe but I'm also not about to be found here, holding a gun by the dead body of a shifter. But I also couldn't get up, my foot was now swollen and in so much pain that to even wiggle my toes elicited a howl and a loud scream from me. I close my eyes and face the truth. I was going to jail, there was no way they would believe my story, even dressed as I was. I'm just a lowly omega after all and Thomas was, well, rich. I was done for. I can't even bring myself to try and get to the door, too exhausted from my fighting and all the trauma I've just gone through. The last thing I expect to hear before I succumb to the darkness surrounding me is my brother's and Johnathon's voice calling out my name before I fall unconscious.

"WINTER."

Chapter 16 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Damien POV

I feel bad. I had to leave Winter at home this morning because I had football practice. Well okay, I was staring at the cheerleaders and maybe some of the other girls that cheered for them. A crappy reason to leave my sister behind, right? I should have stayed, but surely dad was way too drunk to do anything. He'd been completely out of it when I left, so I thought it was safe. I shake my head. I'll check later to make sure that she's made it to school safely. I promised her I'd change and I meant every single word of it.

There's a niggly feeling in my gut and I don't even dare wait until lunch like my original plan to find her. Instead, I go to the administration office and get glared at by the secretary. Clearly, she doesn't like me. Like I care, heck the feeling was mutual. I drum my fingers across the desk just to piss her off some more.

"Can I help you?" she says snidely and I so badly want to give her the finger, but making sure Winter is OK is my first priority. I could always give her the finger when I left.

"I'm wondering what class my sister Winter is in right now. I need to speak to her" I mumbled. There's no need to tell her my last name. I've been in this office so many times to see the headmaster that the secretary knows my full name by heart.

She scowls at me and then, slowly, pulls up something from her computer. At least she's not arguing with me, but then maybe she just wants me the hell out of her office.

"Why are you looking for your sister when she called in sick today" the woman snaps, as though I've wasted her precious time. I swear she rolled her eyes at me.

"Winter called in sick". I double-checked. I don't believe her. Winter has never missed a day of school. Even when she was being bullied relentlessly or sick with a cold, she went to school. Her grades were very important to her.

"Yes she called in sick," the secretary says irritably, and I still.

"Did she call or did her father?" I asked in a whisper, my gut churning.

Now she looks even more annoyed. "Does it matter?"

"Yes," I say with gritted teeth "it matters a lot" and she sighs, pushing away her chair.

"Wait here while I ask the headmaster" she drawls sarcastically and I glare as I watch her go in.

She's back, surprisingly quickly, and makes a conscious effort to settle herself back in her chair before she looks up and meets my eyes. My arms are folded now and I'm feeling extremely impatient.

"Well," I growled.

"Your father called in sick for Winter. She was too sick to do it herself."

Father would never do something like that, not even if Winter really was sick and she'd been fine last night when we'd been hanging out. I frown.

Something feels dangerously wrong and I don't even have the heart to give the secretary the finger as I leave.

I had no sooner made it to the front door of the school when another kid joined me. I guess I shouldn't say kid because it was the new Alpha boy, Johnathon. How ironic that he has the same name as one of my friends, I think to myself absently as I stop and stare at him, wondering what it is he wants. Clearly, he feels it's disrespectful because his eyes flash and I find myself baring my neck in submission.

"Sorry" I apologized and he glared.

"Are you Winter's brother?" he asks in a dangerous tone and I give a nod.

"I'm looking for her" he adds and I sigh.

"I was just going home to look for her," I told him, and his eyes flashed.

"You think she's in danger," he said to me, and I hesitated, but I can't exactly lie to an alpha.

"I know she's in danger," I said grimly. "Winter's never missed a day of school in her life. If there's anything that means the world to that girl, it's her grades. "

"I'll give you a lift," Johnathon said, looking just as grim, and I gave him a nod of thanks, sensing he was coming with me and wouldn't exactly take no for an answer. This is the asshole who rejected my sister and I was letting him give me a lift to my house! I could yell at him later when I found Winter.

It's not long and we're pulling up in front of the house. Johnathon drives scary and there were moments when I found myself praying for my life while he drove. I almost vomited the contents of my stomach as I got out. It must be nice to be Alpha and not worried about being pulled over, I think sourly as I make my way up the driveway. I don't bother to knock, let alone unlock the door, father's always too drunk to care about stuff like that and we have nothing worth stealing anyway.

I opened the door slowly and peered in. Father is his usual drunk self, sitting on the couch, a beer bottle dangling from his chubby hand, snores permeating the room. I walked in quietly and motioned for Johnathon to follow me. He does, but I notice he looks at father askance and with repulsion on his face. Clearly, he didn't approve.

"I'm going to check her room," I said, and Johnathon nodded, looking over at father. "Keep him in your sight", I whispered and slowly, treaded upstairs, walking straight to Winter's room. She's not in there. I spend time looking in my room and father's, even the bathroom and toilet, but there's no sign of my little sister anywhere.

He's done something to her. I knew it in my bones and I stormed downstairs, Johnathon pointing to the kitchen. I looked in and saw blood on the floor, not a lot, just small spatters, a broken dish, and a teatowel on the ground. To me, it looks like signs of a struggle and I'm in no mood to wait for father to wake up. I stomped over to him and smacked him upside the head with a loud crack that whipped through the air. It's the first time I've hit him and, instead of being worried, I feel powerful, more than ready to take him down if he doesn't tell me what he's done to Winter.

Father groans and I feel no sympathy for him. One eye and then the second one cracks open and he sits bolting upright, his eyes full of scorn as he glares at me. He makes no move to retaliate and it's then that I see what a coward he really is. Why have I been afraid of him all this time?

"What" he snaps, dropping the bottle to the ground and rubbing his flabby face.

"Where's Winter?" I snarled, and he chuckled, as though amused by the situation. I glare harder.

"Why do you care," father says snidely, "you never have before."

"I care now" I thundered and before I knew it, I'd gripped father by the neck and lifted him, his feet dangling uselessly. His eyes widened in alarm. Johnathon is silent in the background, observing it all and making no move to interfere.

"Tell me," I say between gritted teeth and he dangles before grumbling and then finally laughing. I stare at him. Has he lost his marbles?

"You'll get a kick out of this" my father wheezes as I finally drop him, gasping for breath and clutching his throat, a broad grin on his face that makes me want to punch the crap out of him.

"Tell me" I growl and he laughs, doubling over.

I kicked him in the ribs and sent him flying. This was a waste of time, but my god, if he didn't speak I would be dangerously close to killing him right now.

"Fine, fine" he mumbles as I go to hit him again. "I sold her."

I stare. Had he just said what I thought I heard? "You sold her" Johnathon comes forward, his hands clenched into fists, his eyes pitch black as he stares at father with hatred, his alpha authority coming through. "Speak" Johnathon orders and father's helpless to disobey against the alpha tone. For once, I'm grateful for Johnathon's presence.

"I sold her to someone for money", father snaps, and I feel numb. How any father could do that to his daughter was beyond me. I'd never been full of so much disgust for him.

"Who" thunders Johnathon and father casts a sly look at me as though he finds something funny about it. I realized why a moment later.

"I sold her to your friend Thomas."

Chapter 17 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Damien POV

I stared at my father in stupefaction. I had to have heard him wrong, but there was a growing anger inside of me that told me I heard him clearly.

"What do you mean you sold her to Thomas" I breathed evenly, feeling sick to my stomach. Not my best friend. He wouldn't do this to me, would he?

"I mean he gave me money for her" My father snaps and I pale, giving him one last kick to the stomach, unable to even look him in the eyes anymore.

"I can't believe Thomas would go this far" I whispered. I knew Thomas had a crush on my sister, but to buy her? I wasn't stupid, even though we hung out together, Thomas was from a completely different world with rich parents who ignored his bad behavior when it suited them. He had money at his disposal whenever he wanted it. I wasn't naive enough to believe it had been to prevent my father from selling Winter to someone else or to be a good Samaritan.

Johnathon comes closer, his eyes pitch black, boring into my father's, utter contempt in his gaze. "You'll pay for this" he whispers "it's the lowest of lows, what you've just done. I'll make sure you never see daylight again", he vows, and I feel a sense of relief. If he follows through with his threat, I'll never have to deal with my father again. Neither will Winter. I feel a rush of gratitude toward Alpha Johnathon.

"I am no longer your son" I hissed at my father, who looked startled for a moment before he shrugged. I don't wait around any longer, storming outside while Johnathon stays inside for a moment, doing who knows what. I heard a howl from my father and smirked. Whatever it was, it had been painful.

"Do you know where Thomas lives," Johnathon growls, and I hesitate.

I've only ever been to Thomas's house once before and I only kind of remembered some of the way but it stood out. Surely, if we headed in the general direction we would come across it? Even my friends didn't know. None of them had been invited to Thomas's house.

"I only know some of the way" I admit, and Alpha Johnathon looks pissed but resigned, climbing into the passenger seat while I awkwardly get in the drivers.

"It's better than nothing" he mutters "I can try and smell her blood. My nose is more sensitive and maybe, being my mate, my wolf will pick up her scent easier."

I can't help myself. "You rejected her", I snapped, "so you're not really mates anymore, are you" I add sarcastically, not caring if I'm insulting the big bad Alpha. He glowers at me.

"I made a mistake" he whispered as I started the car up, "or at least I think I did. I don't know" he exhaled before looking at me grimly, "but do you really want to spend time arguing over this or do you want to find your sister?"

I start to drive.

I'm sweating, all the houses look the same and even Johnathon is cursing in the passenger seat. The more time passes, the more panicked I feel. I tried calling Thomas's number but he did not answer his phone. I'm not surprised. I hit the steering wheel in frustration. Then Johnathon stiffens. "My wolf is going crazy", he breathes "keep going in this direction", he orders, and I'm quick to

obey. My heart is hammering in my chest and I'm terrified for my younger sister. This is all my fault. It's my so-called friend who's paid for her. I should have stayed home this morning. I should have been there to protect her. I'm the big brother and she's so small, so little. I can't even think about what she might be going through right now because then I'll lose control.

"Stop", Johnathon shouts and I stop, parking the car automatically. There's a mansion up ahead and I give a sigh of relief. I would recognize Thomas's house anywhere.

"That's his place," I said and got out of the car, but Johnathon held out a hand to stop me from going any further, a grim expression on his face.

"I smell blood," he says, and I swear. If Thomas hurt her, I was going to kill him. My hands are itching to beat the crap out of him as it is. Thomas is a dead man as soon as I get Winter out of his clutches.

"It's not just Winter's," Johnathon snaps, "and there's lots of it."

I nod, but it doesn't stop me from racing to the front door. I don't even knock, just barrel in and Johnathon is right behind me when we both halt inside. We both scream out at the same time "Winter" as we see her lying there, like a broken rag doll, a gun by her side. She's covered in blood splatter and I can see blood trickling out of her throat.

Johnathon rushes over to check on Thomas while I go to my baby sister's side. She's breathing but barely and I shrug out of my jacket, draping it over her. I see what she's wearing and what she's missing and I feel a new sense of hatred towards Thomas.

"He's dead" Johnathon declared with satisfaction. "It looks like she shot him a few times."

"It's the least the bastard deserves" I mutter while he takes his phone out and rings for an ambulance, my eyes focused on Winter as I place a hand against her throat in an effort to stem some of the bleeding, but it seems to be stopping on its own.

Johnathon glanced at me, his own expression one of anger and pain as he glanced at the mate he rejected. I don't have the heart to yell at him over it anymore. I take Winter's hand in my own.

"I'm so sorry Winter, I should have taken you with me this morning, this is all my fault" I cried, and Johnathon placed a hand on my shoulder.

"You couldn't have known what your father was planning," he said firmly as I listened, not really believing his words but appreciating them anyway, "as it is some of my men have taken him into custody. He'll be spending time in my dungeon" he growls, and I nod, not even a little sympathetic to the bastard father of mine. In fact, if I could, I would be right there torturing him on behalf of Winter's sake.

She's so damn pale and I glance at Johnathon, who looks just as worried. "Where's the damn ambulance" I growl, "it should be here by now."

We hear the sirens, thank god, and within moments paramedics are swarming around us, taking over, forcing me to release my hand which doesn't want to let go.

"You'll have to follow us there, there isn't enough room for you," one tells me before they leave and Johnathon thanks them, getting into the car as I follow him slowly, unable to comprehend everything going on. I'm detached, as though facing reality is far too painful and I climb into the passenger seat, tears finally flowing down my cheeks as Johnathon starts the car. Winter is never going to forgive me for this and I don't blame her. She's going to hate me and now I'll never have a relationship with my baby sister.

Chapter 18 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Johnathon POV

I'm sitting in the hospital waiting room with Winter's brother Damien and he can't seem to keep still. I don't blame him, all I can see in my mind's eye is Winter, lying there, on the cold tiled floor, blood all over her, her panties missing, and dressed in some sort of lingerie. My wolf had been ready to kill and I'd been more than a little disappointed to find that bastard Thomas was already dead. I was also a little proud of Winter for killing him. She was strong, stronger than I had thought her capable of.

Finally, the wait seems to be over and I jump up as a doctor comes walking over to me. As an Alpha, it rankles that I haven't been allowed back past the waiting area and I'm told it was because I couldn't be there while Winter was going through surgery. Her brother has been deadly quiet since we came here and it's like he's in his own little world, one that I don't want to pull him out of.

"Alpha Johnathon", he greets me cordially, and, finally, I see some life come back to Damien. He sits upright and stares at the doctor hopefully, desperate to hear some sort of news about his sister. I'm anxious about my mate and my wolf is going insane inside my head right now, absolutely beside himself over Winter.

"How is she?" I'm afraid to ask but force the words out. Surely she can't be dead? I would have felt it through the mate bond, wouldn't I have? I don't know anymore. The doctor looks grim and I feel my heart beginning to pound wildly in my chest.

"Winter is out of surgery" he begins, and I feel a tiny sense of relief, her brother's face lighting up with hope.

I'm afraid to ask but I force the words out anyway, "Was she sexually assaulted?" I croak out and the doctor shakes his head.

"From what we were able to determine, she wasn't sexually assaulted. However, she does have bruises and a gunshot wound to her foot. It's infected so we are giving her antibiotics and monitoring her closely. "

I nodded, my mind focusing on his words. Thank god she hadn't been sexually abused, it's the only positive thing to come out of it. We hadn't been too late after all but she'd gone through something traumatic before we could get there. Only she would know what it was.

"There's something else," the doctor says, and Damien gets up, standing beside me and looking intently at the doctor, his hands clenched into fists. I didn't miss the flash of relief in his eyes when the doctor said Winter hadn't been raped. I don't even want to know what the poor bastard is going through knowing his own friend had purchased his little sister as a whore.

"What is it?" I asked urgently and Damien nodded, his eyes staring directly into the doctor who was beginning to look a little uncomfortable.

"Her vocal cords were ripped apart by the attack" the doctor explained hesitantly, "as a shifter they may heal, but it will take months before she'll be able to speak again and that's only if they do heal. There is a chance that they are too damaged beyond repair and she'll be mute for the rest of her life."

I'm silent for a moment. It's a lot to take in, but my wolf and I don't care if she can't speak. There are other ways to talk with someone, but her brother looks

absolutely devastated. He broke down in the car on the way here and I'm terrible at comforting people. I've always seen crying as a sign of weakness, but right now I can feel my own eyes beginning to well up.

"She can't speak" her brother whispers, sinking back onto the chair and putting his face in between his trembling hands. "Oh my god," he says, and then goes quiet once more.

"Is she awake?"

The doctor shook his head. "She's still recovering from the surgery. We patched up the gunshot wound and attempted to fix the vocal chord damage but there was nothing more we could do. It will be some hours if she wakes up" he explained kindly, and I sighed. There's no way I'm moving from this hospital until I can see for myself that she's alright. I have an overwhelming desire to be near her, to hold her in my arms and never let her go, and I know it's the mate bond strengthening rather than fading. Does she feel it on her end or is it just me? This was a mess.

"Can we see her?" Damien asked quietly, and I looked at the doctor, who looked a little weary.

"I'm not supposed to let you," he says, "but as an Alpha, you can command me and I will have to obey. So there's no real point denying you is there," he says, and I grin.

"There really isn't" I agree and the doctor sighs and motions to both of us to follow him.

I walked down feeling trepidation. I've never liked hospitals, they always seem so cold and impersonal. Luckily, Winter's been put in a room close by and the doctor leaves us outside the door with a warning.

"Do not touch her, she's hooked up to machines at the moment. If she wakes, come get me or a nurse immediately" and we both nodded at him, understanding his concern. Poor Damien looks like he's about to break the door down and I thank the doctor as he leaves.

Damien opens the door and crashes inside while I follow. When I see Winter, I stop in my tracks and my mouth falls open in complete shock. She's pale, so pale and she's clad in a hospital gown. I could see a bandage wrapped around her foot where she had been shot and there were bruises all over her

face and arms and legs. There's an IV drip in her hand and another one monitoring her blood pressure.

"My god" Damien whispers, sinking down into a chair "she's just," he sounds helpless and I walk closer, my own heart seizing in pain. There's nothing of the girl I met the first time left. This is an empty shell of what she once was. I reached over to touch her hair, ignoring the doctor's warnings. It's matted, blood still in it, and I can smell it. I pull a chair over to the bed and sit there, unable to do anything but stare, my heart squeezing in my chest. Then I see her eyelids flutter. Is she waking up?

Chapter 19 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

I'm walking in a field surrounded by all sorts of vibrantly beautiful flowers. I have no clue where I am, but I feel peaceful and relaxed. It's confusing. I remember shooting Thomas and passing out. Had I died? Because if I had, I couldn't complain about the beauty and serenity of this place. I touch the flowers and feel the softness of their petals, smell their beautiful perfume as it drifts in the air, stare at the bees buzzing around and feel the cool breeze as it flows through my hair.

There's no pain, it's the first thing I realize and I stare down at my body, which is whole, with no sign of the gunshot in my foot or any bruises. There's no blood and I'm wearing a purple sundress that cascades down to my toes, my feet are bare and sinking into the soft green, lush grass. I'm in heaven.

I sit and begin to make little daisy chains. Time seems to have no meaning here and I figure if I'm dead then anything goes. The daisy chain goes on top of my head and I smile, lying back down on the soft grass and staring up at the clouds in the clear blue sky. I wonder about my brother and if he's doing okay, and even feel a little sorry for Johnathon, who probably felt bad for rejecting me. I don't even think about my father and what he'd done to me. It was like every emotion of mine just slowly faded away and left me feeling peaceful. If this was heaven, then it wouldn't be too bad.

"You're not dead yet," a musical voice says and I blink at the shadow suddenly blocking my sight. There's a beautiful woman in front of me with silvery gray hair and sparkling blue eyes. She's not old though, she looks like a young woman and she's wearing a silver dress that shimmers in the sunlight, a small tiara sits upon her head.

"Then where am I?" I asked, confused, as she helped me to sit up.

"You're in between," the woman says, and I frown, still just as puzzled. She sits on the grass beside me.

"Who are you?"

She laughs and looks at me. "You will know me as the moon goddess," she says lightly, and I feel a sense of panic. She was the moon goddess. Should I curtsy or how did I address her? I began to feel dizzy.

"Just call me Selene," she says, and I give her a small smile.

"What do you mean by in between?" I asked.

"You're neither dead nor alive right now," she says and gives me a stern look. "You haven't decided which way you want to go yet."

She takes my hand. "Child, you've known a lot of pain" she exhales, her blue eyes no longer twinkling but far more serious now as I say nothing "I know you've wished yourself dead many times before, but this time you have a choice. I have seen everything you've gone through and how strong and brave you've been. But now you have to decide whether you want to live or die?"

I think about it. If I live, then I go back to feeling pain, harassment, and bullying, it will just start all over again. There was also the issue of my father. I couldn't bare to go back home. What was the point of living when it made me so miserable?

"Before you decide," Selena says to me, "I want you to know something. You might be feeling pain right now and not just the physical kind, but your life, should you choose to go back, will get better. You will find the love you deserve, even if it's with someone you least expect. You are brave, strong, and courageous. You just have to believe it. It's time you stood up for yourself and what you want instead of pleasing everyone Winter. If you choose death, then your story and your journey are completely over. You won't ever get a chance to bond with your wolf, you'll just be gone."

I felt like crying. "No one will care if I'm gone" I blurt out.

"Your brother and your ahem mate," she says quietly, "or ex-mate is in the hospital room with you right now. Your brother is beating himself up for what's

happened to you and Johnathon is doing the same. Neither one of them will leave your side. They've both hurt you, but if you're willing to forgive them, they may just show you how much they care and it might surprise you to see how much."

"I can't go back to father," I said miserably, "I just can't."

She squeezes my hand. "He's no longer there child, he can't hurt you anymore. "

"Why didn't you help me" I whispered, tears flowing down my cheeks. ". You're the moon goddess. You could have saved me."

She looks remorseful. "I cannot intervene in someone's path. As much as I would have liked to, it would have strayed you from the path you took. This experience is what helps mold you into the person you will become. Or rather what you do. "

I pull at the grass. I need time to think. But part of me has already decided, even if part of me doesn't want to, wants to stay in this in-between place forever where I never have to be hurt again. But to choose death would be cowardly, especially since I knew that Damien was waiting for me to wake up. I'm not sure what to think about Alpha Johnathon being there as well. It still hurts that he rejected me so quickly.

"What will you do?" she asks and I sigh, looking over at the meadow and feeling a sense of regret. Was this really the right decision for me?

"I choose to live" I answered regretfully and a smile lit up her face.

"You are destined for great things, Winter" she whispers "remember that when it becomes too hard or you find yourself in the depths of despair. You'll go far. "

I open my mouth, wanting to ask her when she taps me lightly on the forehead and I feel my eyes beginning to close against my will. I struggle and she merely sits there, watching me lie down and yawn. My eyelids are heavy and they close, shutting out the sunlight as I fall asleep. I feel like I'm falling from a great distance and it's surreal like I'm flying, and then suddenly there's a sharp pain in my heart and chest and I begin to open my eyes, hearing an annoying beeping sound and a familiar voice.

"She's awake."

Chapter 20 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

I managed to force my eyes open and I frowned, taking in the white sterile walls and hearing a familiar shout. "She's awake" as Alpha Johnathon's face came into focus. I blink, realizing he's holding my hand, but it's the searing pain in my chest that concerns me most and as I open my mouth to shout, nothing comes out. Not even a whisper. Now I'm panicking. What's wrong with me? Why can't I talk? The pain in my chest gets worse and I hear an annoying beeping sound.

"Let go of her hand," a voice says and I see a doctor examining me, blinking as bright light floods into my eyelids, a needle piercing my skin and making me relax, the pain beginning to fade.

"Winter, can you hear me?" the man in the white coat says, and I give a small nod, seeing Damien in the corner of my eye, standing out of the way, his eyes wide open in what looks like shock.

"Alright, well, I need you to calm down, alright? That beeping noise is because your heart rate picked right up. Take a few deep breaths for me", he instructs, and I do, breathing in and out until the beeping noise steadies out.

"Good", the doctor looked pleased. "Now do you know where you are?"

I nod. "Do you remember what happened?" he asks and I shudder, my body beginning to tremble in fear. I'll never forget what happened. It's etched firmly in my mind.

I place a hand against my throat and the doctor looks at me with sympathy in his eyes. "During the attack, your vocal cords were damaged", he explains "I'm afraid there's no telling if they will heal or not."

I said nothing, my eyes welling with tears. The moon goddess could have warned me about this before I chose. How does someone manage without their voice? I can't yell or scream for help and I begin to feel vulnerable.

"Your brother and your mate are here. Do you think that you'll be alright while I go and fetch some medicine for you?"

I hesitate. But the moon goddess had said that they hadn't left my side and so I gave a small nod, watching as the doctor left. Damien comes to my side and tries to reach for my hand and I instinctively flinch. He looks hurt but I can't help it.

"I guess I deserve that" he mutters, "I'm so sorry Winter, I swear I had no idea that father would be so evil and cruel. I know I should have stayed behind instead of leaving you alone."

I looked at him. Part of me hates him for doing that, but part of me wants to forgive him as well. After all, it's not like he could have known what father was going to do, but the part that really rankles is that it was his friend Thomas who bought me and tried to rape me.

"I'll make this up to you, I swear," Damien tells me, and I give a small nod, deciding that I'll believe it when I see it. Until then I'm reserving my judgment. I glanced over at Alpha Johnathon, wondering why the hell he was there. He'd rejected me, so why did he give a damn what happened to me? I feel bitterness towards him.

"Winter I" he exhales as I sit there still as a statue "I don't know what to say" he admits, "on the one hand, I've rejected you, and yet part of me still cares about you. I never wanted to hurt you as much as I have and it wasn't my intention."

That's all he had to say? I felt a spurt of anger and glared at him. I don't need this right now. If he felt bad, then that was his problem, not mine. I accepted his rejection, so why was he still having feelings for me? Cause I sure as hell wasn't having any towards him, well not besides anger and bitterness.

He sees how angry I am from the expression on my face. "I think it's best I take my leave" he whispers, and I nod, feeling bad but not wanting to face him right now. I'm grateful that he's helped me, but that's as far as it goes. He shakes hands with my brother Damien, who slaps him on the shoulder.

"Thank you for everything man, I don't know if I would have found her without you," he tells Damien, who just grunts and then walks out the door. Before he leaves, he shoots me one last look that I can't decipher and then he's gone, his footsteps sounding down the corridor.

I watch warily as Damien sits on a chair beside me. He looks exhausted, with dark circles under his eyes and pale. How long have I been out? I can't even

ask. It's frustrating. You think they would have given me a notepad and pen or something so I could communicate.

"Winter", Damien begins, and I cock my head and listen "you don't have to worry about going back home. Father's gone for good this time. You'll never have to be scared of him again."

That's one good piece of news for me at least. My skin crawls just thinking of the man who sold me without a qualm. Some father he was. I actually hope he's dead. That's how much I hate him.

"When we get back home I'll take care of you. No more bullying or forcing you to do my homework. We can even live in the pack house if you want", he offers.

I think about that. I had wanted to live in the pack house when I was younger, but now I wasn't so sure. Damien reckoned I wouldn't be bullied still, but how would pack members react to having a mute shifter in the house? Would it be safer there? I highly doubted it. If dad was gone, then it would be safer, at least for me to stay in our house away from the pack where I wouldn't be made fun of or worse. I gave a firm shake of my head and saw the light dim from my brother's eyes. If he wanted to live in the pack house then he could. I sure as hell wasn't stopping him. But he shrugs at me instead.

"No problem, we'll stay home then," he says, just like that, and for the first time I smile at him.

"How are you doing?" a voice asked and I watched the doctor come back into the room, clutching a bunch of pill bottles. He lines them up next to me on the little food table. "These are for pain," he tells me, and I see Damien listening closely "one a day. These are antibiotics" he points to another one "three times a day. And this" he points to a third one "is for when the pain is so excruciating you can't take it anymore and need instant relief. Only when needed" he warned, and I nodded.

"Does that mean I can take her home?" Damien asks, and the doctor looks at me.

"That's up to her. Winter would you like to go home today or stay overnight?" he asks. How am I supposed to answer?

I pointed to Damien. "Go home?" Damien checked and I nodded. I'd rather sleep in my own bed than a hospital one that's uncomfortable. I'm already freezing.

"Take the pills and there's a prescription for repeats if she needs them" the doctor informs him as Damien hastily places them all in his pocket. I go to swing my leg out and silently gasp at the pain.

"Crutches" the doctor exclaims, and fetches two that I hadn't noticed leaning against the wall, he hands them to me and I get on my legs experimentally. It takes almost no time to learn how to use them and Damien supports me all the way to the car.

"Best of luck," the doctor says warmly "we'll have a check-up in six weeks' time and see how your vocal cords are looking then" he adds, and I nod, crossing my fingers. With any luck, I'll be speaking again in a few weeks. All I have to do is be patient.