

Chapter 21 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

We pull up into the driveway and I shudder looking at the house. Had it always looked this intimidating and imposing or was my imagination going into overdrive? I'm reluctant to get out of the car and I watch as Damien gets out, part of me wanting to cower against the seat and stay in the car. I know he's told me that father is gone forever, but a small part of me thinks he could be lying, that this could be a trap and that's what keeps me from getting out. My brother looks exasperated, but I don't care.

"Winter," he says softly, knocking on my window, "it's safe to come out, I promise he's not here."

I just looked at him and then slowly, quietly, got out, closing the car door behind me. To my surprise, Damien took hold of my hand and gave it a squeeze, I guess his way of trying to reassure me as we walked up the driveway and to the front door together.

Damien reaches out and opens the door, turning the light on and going inside, while I clutch his hand with a death grip. The lounge room is completely littered with beer bottles and there's father's odor still drifting in the air. I gag, putting a hand over my mouth and taking deep breaths. I'm aware I'm still in a hospital gown but I'm too scared to go upstairs by myself.

"Are you hungry?" Damien asks and I shake my head, tugging at my hospital gown and looking at him with wide eyes in an effort to get him to understand what I want.

"You want to get changed," he says, and I nod.

"Go on then" he urges, and I shake my head, pulling on his hand while he stares at me confused.

"You want me to come with you?" he asks gently and I nod, staring down at the ground. He uses a finger to lift my chin, staring deeply into my eyes as I blink at him.

"I can come with you," he says gently and I pull him behind me as I try, very awkwardly, to get around on the crutches. Damien gets impatient though and scoops me up, carrying me the rest of the way and placing me on my bed.

My room remains unchanged and I gesture toward my dresser. My brother nods and rifles through the drawers and throws a shirt and pants at me, which I catch, but I continue to look at him. He's clearly perplexed by my expression, but I need underwear, vehemently aware that I'm not wearing any at the moment. I watch as he turns bright red.

"Panties," he says weakly, and I point to the top drawer. He acts as though his hand is burned and flings me a pair immediately as I fight the urge to laugh. He pointedly looked away from me.

"Can you get dressed on your own?" he asks and I nod. There's no way I'm about to ask my brother for help getting dressed. I don't care how long it takes, I'll do it myself.

"I'll wait in the hallway," he says, then frowns. "Knock on the wall or something when you are finished. I forgot you can't talk" he says apologetically, and I wait impatiently until he's left the room.

I curse silently in my mind as I begin to wriggle into my underwear and pants, every movement excruciating. The shirt was the easiest part and I was panting heavily by the time I was done. The clothes hung on me but so did the rest of them and it's not like I had anyone I was trying to impress. I use my fist to knock on my bedroom wall loudly.

He came rushing in. "Anything else you need?"

I shook my head and then stopped him before he could pick me up. I mime a pen and paper, pretending to write, and thankfully he gets the message.

"Pen and paper" he muttered, and I pointed to my desk where a notepad and pen sat. He grabs it and then hands it to me, before swiftly picking me up and taking me downstairs.

Damien goes to place me on the couch and I flinch, looking at him in horror. "You need to rest" he whispers, "dad usually used the recliner anyway", he points out, and I relax, letting him put me down.

"Now, how about some food or a drink?" he suggests, looking a little lost. This is all new to him, but it is for me too. I'm not used to anyone caring for me like this.

I mime drinking and he brings me water before sitting next to me, carefully placing my bad foot and leg on top of his lap.

"Winter, I understand if you don't want to go to school tomorrow and I'm happy to stay with you for as long as you need," he says, and I frown. I don't want to go back to school, not ever, but I couldn't stay away forever could I? But I feel fragile, broken inside and I can't stand the thought of being bullied while I'm like this. I just want to curl up under my bed and stay there where it's safe.

Damien's waiting for me to answer though, and I reluctantly grab the notebook, scribbling my answer inside and showing it to him.

I'll go to school but I really don't want to. How do I know you've really changed?

"I'll stick by your side Winter, I won't let anyone near you" he promised, and I stare him down, fidgeting with my hands. I had no choice but to trust him, but I still remember every harsh word he uttered towards me and every hit and slap he gave me. I give a small nod, feeling tired and exhausted as well as in pain. With any luck, my foot will heal overnight, or at least part of it, so that I can walk on my own instead of relying on Damien to help me. I pointed towards his pocket. The pain is so bad that I'm desperate for something that will help with it and I remember the doctor handing the pain pills to Damien in the hospital. He pats his pocket.

"Here's the painkiller and antibiotics. If you need a strong one, point it out again."

I shake my head. Normal painkillers would do for now, but I wouldn't mind having the strong ones close by tonight. I scribble that in my little notepad and he agrees, promising to leave them and the other pills by my bedside. My stomach gives a loud growl and it's then that I finally notice that I'm hungry. My brother gives a grin. "Food" he teases and springs into action while I settle back on the couch and ponder what going to school is going to be like tomorrow. I haven't even thought about Thomas or his parents and I feel a sense of dread. Had Johnathon dealt with that or was I going to be facing the police tomorrow? This was a shifter town, so I didn't have to worry about human cops, but that didn't stop the nervousness or the trembling. I hadn't been at fault, I'd defended myself, but would everyone else believe that?

Chapter 22 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Damien POV

I spend the whole night tossing and turning and checking on Winter, who's fast asleep in her bed. I'm terrified of leaving her alone too long and, in the end, I end up sleeping in the hallway on a mattress in case she needs help with something, anything during the night. When it's bright, my eyes open and I groan as I sit up, my muscles stiff and protesting. She hadn't called out last night, but then again she couldn't, and when I poked my head in she was still out for the count.

I get dressed for school, tossing on a shirt and any old jeans, glance at the time, and make my way into Winter's room. I gently shake her awake. I don't want to startle her. Her eyelids flutter at me and then her eyes widen when she sees me, her mouth making a shocked O. I wonder if she's scared of me still because she still trembles every time I touch her or I'm near her.

"It's time to get ready for school," I said lightly, and glanced down at her foot. Is it healed yet?

She pats the bandage. "You want it off?" I ask and she nods. I softly take hold of the end of the bandage and unwrap it, watching Winter's face the entire time. I can barely believe my eyes once it's off and I can see her skin, perfect, except for a tiny scar that the bullet presumably left. There's a broad smile on Winter's face as she stands up and takes a few steps.

She whirls around and hugs me, my breath catching in my throat as I hold her tight, not wanting to let go, and I step back, looking into her eyes. "School," I say firmly and she nods, pointing to the bathroom where I assume she wants to take a shower first. I give a nod. "I'll make breakfast", I offer and she nods again, before going into the bathroom and firmly shutting the door close on me. I figure, since she's walking fine now, that she won't get into any harm and head downstairs to the kitchen.

It's easy enough to make toast and coffee for her and by the time I've finished eating my own breakfast she comes walking in looking somewhat downcast. I got her to sit down.

"What's wrong Winter?"

She pulls at her hair and I have a look, realizing that it's still matted with dried blood. Clearly, it hadn't washed out for her. "Do you want me to help you wash it?"

She shook her head, looking miserable. "How about you try again tonight?" I urged. "I'm sure it will come out with some elbow grease."

She just sighs and glances down at her toast. I watched her take a tentative nip and then push it away, opting to drink the coffee instead. Did I burn the toast too much? I didn't think it was that bad. Maybe she's not hungry. I think to myself, she's probably still nervous about school.

I waited for her to finish and then pointed to her school bag. She grabs it without any expression on her face and walks to the front door while I follow. She gets in the passenger seat of the car and I drive, keeping an eye on her the whole time, noting that her body is shaking and that her face has gone completely white. By the time we get to school, she's clutching the side of the car door and looking panicked as all hell.

"Winter," I said sharply, "calm down. The principal knows your situation and so do the teachers. They all know you can't talk. I've already called the school. If this is too much for you, I can drive you home", I added, and she relaxed slightly.

I opened the door and climbed out, hoping she wouldn't lock herself in the car. I'm pleased when she gets out on her own and I take her hand, ignoring the strange looks from everybody as we walk together into the building.

"Lead me to your first class", I order her and she slowly, timidly leads the way as I stand right next to the door along with her. She's biting her lip and looking frightened, Alpha Johnathon suddenly comes up beside me.

"It's nice to see you at school Winter," he says cheerfully while I scowl at him. The nerve of this guy. "I forgot to mention that Thomas's parents know the full story of what went on and the police have no interest in getting your statement. It's all taken care of. "

I watch as Winter gives Johnathon a shy smile and mouths the words 'thank you' at him. I'm slightly disgruntled by it.

The bell rings. Students begin to file into the classroom and I release Winter's hand. "I'll come for you after class" I mutter, but she shakes her head. She showed me the notepad.

I can get to class on my own. If you keep holding my hand and taking me, then we'll both be teased. Let me do this myself, please.

I don't care about being teased, but it's evident that Winter does and I sigh. "Fine" I agree, even though I don't like it "but if there's trouble, come and get me", I mutter and she nods, quietly going into the classroom while I watch until the door closes.

Naturally, I'm late for class, but I don't give a damn, merely scowling as the teacher lectures me on punctuality. I barely even remember what subject I'm in, let alone what I'm supposed to be doing, because my mind is on my little sister the whole time. I hope she's doing okay and that no one is harassing her. Johnathon had already pulled me aside and told me he'd told other shifters to look out for her too. It was a nice gesture on his part, but I don't see why he's going to so much trouble. From what I can see, Winter has shown no interest in him whatsoever. But he doesn't seem to be getting the hint or maybe he's just too stubborn for his own good. I groan and look at the clock which is ticking slowly, counting down the minutes until the bell finally rings. Winter might want me to stay away, but that didn't mean I couldn't keep watch from a distance and intervene on her behalf if someone dared touch or abuse her in any way.

But she makes her way to her next class without incident and I'm somehow not surprised to find I'm not the only one keeping a close eye from far away. Johnathon meets my eyes and gives a small nod of recognition before going into his own classroom and I sidle over to mine. It looked like Winter was safe enough today after all.

Chapter 23 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

Damien has been in full-on overprotective big brother mode all night and today while taking me to school. Don't get me wrong. I appreciate it. After all, it's a nice feeling, but part of me is annoyed as well. He seems to think I'm some helpless victim and, while I'm nervous about the fact I can't speak, I know that I'm going to have to adjust to that and attend school whether I like it or not. I've also noticed Alpha Johnathon keeping a close eye on me and it angers me even more. Why can't he just leave me alone? Why does he care so damn much? because if he had wanted a mate, he wouldn't have rejected me out of hand. Would he?

My first class went miserably. The second the teacher leaves the room to photocopy some papers, Jessica butts her nose in. Somehow, I'm not even surprised.

"Winter," she said, turning to me while the class snickered "I heard you can't talk anymore" she sang, getting up from her seat and sauntering over, throwing her groupies a big grin as they watched, eyes wide in anticipation. I know something's coming and sure enough, her hand shoots out, gripping me by the hair and she smacks my face into the desk while I gasp. I can't yell, can't shout, all I can do is make a small gasping noise as she giggles.

"Oh, this is going to be so much fun" she declares as the whole class erupts into laughter "she's mute, can you believe it? Poor little Winter" she drawls, slowly going back to her seat, evidently realizing the teacher is making his way back to the classroom. I merely rub my cheek and stared resolutely out of the window. I'm not going to let them get to me. I chant to myself but I feel deflated. I feel vulnerable without my voice. I feel even more afraid than I was before.

I should have realized Jessica would take advantage of me not being able to call out. But part of me had hoped she might have an inkling of compassion and leave me alone, but she clearly has a heart of stone. There's no compassion or empathy in that girl at all, she's just a nasty bitch and I had better remember that if I want to survive the next few weeks of the term.

The bell rings and I make sure that I'm the last one to file out, wanting to make sure Jessica's made her way to her next class, which thankfully isn't the same as mine. The teacher gives me a glance but says nothing. It's not like they've ever helped me anyway and I'm not about to start thinking they will now.

I'd have to be an idiot not to see my brother or Alpha Johnathon watching my every move as I walked to class. I can feel them staring at me and it's embarrassing. I shouldn't need protection, I shouldn't be wasting their time when they need to go to class as well. It's almost a relief when it's lunchtime and I can escape outside. I never sit inside the cafeteria, it's far too crowded and there are far too many students for my liking. Instead, I take my lunch and sit outside under a tree, breathing in the cool, fresh air and enjoying the warm sunshine. Then a shadow falls over me and I glance up to see that Jessica and her groupies have followed me. I swallow hard and frantically search for anyone to help, but everyone pointedly looks away and there's no sign of my brother or Johnathon, for that matter.

"Is it true you're a murderer?" Jessica asks and I don't answer, wanting to get to my feet and she shoves me back down, my back hitting the trunk of the tree as I slide down. She smirks.

"I didn't think you'd have it in you," she says mockingly, and I stare up, blinking, waiting for her to do whatever it is she came to do and then leave.

"Thomas didn't deserve what you did to him, he was one of us Winter and we always take care of our own" she threatens, and I tremble.

Thankfully, I hear a voice and it's Alpha Johnathon who looks pissed. "Leave her alone" he growls, and they scatter as he turns to me and helps me to my feet.

"You really need to learn to stand up for yourself", he scolds me, and I just look at him. Jessica and her groupies outnumbered me ten to one and he wanted me to fight them with no wolf? Was he an idiot? Jessica's parents were rich and would have no problems getting me kicked out of school. Does he not realize that? Although now my grades don't seem to matter to me, not like they once had. I've changed and I know it's not for the better.

I duck my head and hear him curse, as though realizing he's upsetting me. Without a word, I started to make my way inside. He catches up to me and pulls my arm, halting me in my tracks. "Winter, I'm sorry" he apologized, "I didn't mean to make you upset, it's just that I hate to see you bullied and not take a stand against them. I don't understand what you're afraid of", he adds, sounding exasperated. Of course, he wouldn't understand, we're both from different worlds. He's an almighty powerful Alpha that can pretty much do whatever he wants without consequences. I'm a lowly omega for now and am restricted by my lack of power as well as having no one to look out for me. I can't do what I want without suffering the consequences and if I did stand up for myself I would most probably find myself being expelled. I feel tears come to my eyes. He had no idea how much I was suffering right now.

All I saw in my nightmares last night was Thomas's face, seeing every moment of my ordeal over and over until I woke up, unable to scream, unable to do anything but force myself to try and sleep again, so that Damien didn't realize just how scared and cowardly I was. They didn't know anything about me, either of them, and I don't even know if I'll be able to move on as easily as they are expecting me to.

I slowly released my arm, thinking about my situation. A plan started to form in my mind, one that I'd considered before but never had the heart to follow through on anymore. Now it seems to be the only option for me. Jessica's never going to stop and neither are her groupies. Damien can't be by my side every hour of the day and without my voice, I'm useless, unable to defend myself. There's only one thing for me to do, and as I walk away, plotting what I'm about to do, I pray that one day Damien and even Alpha Johnathon will forgive me. Because the harder I think about it, the more certain of the plan I am.

Chapter 24 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Damien POV

Something's wrong, I can sense it, but I can also see by the expression on Winter's face that today hasn't gone as well as I'd hoped, even with myself and Johnathon looking over her. She's so quiet, walking slowly back to the car. She hasn't even looked me in the eyes, not once, and I feel concerned about her. Had something bad happened to her today? I'd struggled to find her at lunch, having looked in the cafeteria and then outside. Apparently, Johnathon had been doing the same thing. I hadn't considered the fact that Winter wouldn't have come and got me, or that she would sit outside, especially with the loss of her voice.

I want to ask, demand answers, but she stares out the window and I sigh, starting the car. Maybe she will write down everything when we get back home.

"Winter," I say quietly while driving, and she finally looks right at me as I ponder the words to say. I don't want to upset her. "Did something happen?"

She fidgets with her hands and stares down at the floor, tentatively shaking her head. I sigh. She's always been a terrible liar. Clearly, there was something she wasn't telling me.

"Winter, were you hurt?"

She shakes her head more adamantly. I wish I could believe her but there's such a look on her face, it's clear she's trying to hide something from me. I just wish she trusted me enough to tell me what it was.

We pull into the driveway and she almost scrambles out of her side, rushing to the front door and pulling on the handle. I raised my eyebrows. Ever since father was conveniently taken by Johnathon's men, I'd been locking the door. We didn't have to worry about father coming back, but I was still worried about our safety. I take my time getting out of the car as she waits for me, her arms folded, looking impatient.

"I'm coming, I'm coming" I grumble and she stamps one foot on the ground. I pull out the front door key from my pocket and unlock the door, pushing it open and watching as she almost bolts upstairs. I debate whether to go after her and decide it might be best to let her have some space.

I closed the door and locked it from the inside, going into the kitchen and staring miserably at the contents. There's barely anything in the refrigerator and I curse. It looks like I'll have to start picking up some hours at my casual job. Especially if I want to keep myself and Winter fed with a roof over our heads.

My phone rings and I absently answer it, holding it to my ear as I rifle through cupboards.

"Did she make it home safe?" the voice asks and I roll my eyes. Of course, it's Johnathon. He'd practically forced me to give him my phone number. Stupid Alpha tone that you can't ignore, I think with a huff. He used it to his advantage.

"Yes she's made it home," I said, a little irritable. As if I can't take care of my own sister, I think a tad sarcastically.

"Good" he exhales and pauses for a moment "how is she?"

He sounds as if he genuinely cares and all I can think about is how he rejected her. He seems remorseful now.

"I don't know," I said a little ungraciously, "she seems to be alright but she won't write to me about today and I think something must have happened. "

I glanced up at the stairs and lowered my voice. "She's hiding something."

"Keep an eye on her" he instructs, and I almost want to swear at him. What did he think I was going to do? Leave her alone. I wasn't even that stupid.

"Right well I need to go", I snapped, and before he could answer, I hung up the phone. It's takeout tonight, I decided, looking around the dismal kitchen and shuddering. The whole house still smells like dad and I begin to open up some windows and let some fresh air in. The whole place still reeks of alcohol and cigarettes. It will take months before it smells nice again. I guess I'll have to start cleaning the house properly at some stage. Winter can help.

I glanced upstairs. She still hadn't come down and I slowly walked upwards. I try to be as quiet as I can. For all I know, she's showering and that's why she's taking so long, but as I walk down the hallway I hear something surprising, something I wasn't expecting to hear. It's a strange noise and I know it's because she's mute, but there's no mistaking it. It's muffled but I still make it out. She's crying to herself and I find myself on the other side of the door, hand up to knock and hesitating. She'd clearly come up to her room to cry and I didn't know what to do. Do I knock on the door and go inside or do I leave her to cry? I'm not good with crying females and I feel slightly panicked the more I hesitate.

Finally, I can't stand it anymore. I knock and then barrel inside. It's not like she can answer anyway and she turns to look at me startled, tears flowing down her pale cheeks. I knelt, taking her face in my hands. "Winter", I said quietly, "whatever it is you know you can talk to me, right? I'm not going to abandon you, I just want you to trust me enough to tell me what's wrong."

She reaches over and hastily grabs her notebook, scribbling something inside.

It's not that I don't trust you, it's that I can't tell you. Sorry Damien

She stares at me with those big blue eyes of hers as I read. I got back up and walked to the doorway. I'm not going to push. "Well, when you're ready, come downstairs, I'm ordering takeout for dinner again. "

I walked downstairs with a heavy heart. I no sooner closed the door before my little sister started weeping again, and my heart gave a pang. What is it that's making her act this way and making her so miserable? It's times like these that I wish mother was still alive, she would know how to comfort Winter in a heartbeat. She'd always been good with us as children. Whereas I feel useless as the older brother who's clearly out of his depth when it comes to helping or comforting my little sister.

Chapter 25 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

It's my eighteenth birthday next week, which falls neatly into my plan. I doubt Damien even remembers, he's not celebrated any of my birthdays before and it's not like Johnathon's going to know. All I have to do is hold on until then. Because then I can shift, I'll finally have my wolf and that is the most important aspect of my plan.

I'm leaving this place. I have no ties to my home, except for Damien, and I don't want to be a burden to him. In my condition, unable to talk to him, I'm not much of a sister or someone he can talk to. I also know that he's planning on getting a job to look after us both and, while I would do the same, who would hire someone who was mute? I'm not stupid, it was easy enough to see the expression on the doctor's and Damien's faces. My vocal cords have been damaged beyond repair, it was only going to be more painful to have hope.

I can't bear to go downstairs and see Damien because if I spend too much time with him, in the next few days, then I might change my mind. I'm in so much agony because of my decision, that my chest hurts and it feels tight, tears welling up in the corner of my eyes. Would I hurt my brother for doing this? Or would he be relieved to no longer have me, a burden, to contend with? As for Johnathon? He confused me. It's like he couldn't bear to be too far from me, or maybe it was guilt for rejecting me. I'd felt the mate bond sever, even if I hadn't really made a big deal of it. So he should move on with his life, just like I want to move on from mine. I refuse to feel bad about it. He'll find another mate. Hell Jessica desperately wanted him and she always gets what she wants eventually. I'd be surprised if he refused her advances a second time.

I can't stay up here forever though. Damien's already suspicious and so I force myself to come out of my room and go downstairs where I can hear Damien on the phone, presumably to some friend of his. I'm about to walk forward and let him know I'm there when I hear his conversation and realize he's talking about me. But to who?

"Yes sir, I really appreciate you taking the time to call. So you're of the opinion that she won't ever be able to talk again" Damien sounds frustrated but I jolt, realizing he's talking to the doctor.

"What am I going to do? I can't be with her every hour of the day", Damien says, exasperated, and I flinch. He sounds so defeated, so broken as his voice cracks.

"Surely there's something you can do? Winter needs to be able to talk, I don't think you understand. I can't protect her if she can't tell me anything or scream out."

I inched closer, seeing tears flowing down my brother's cheeks. I'm absolutely heartbroken. This is what I've turned my brother into. His concern is touching, but he's so afraid for me. Am I that much of a weakling that he feels this way? That he needs to protect me while I'm at school?

"No surgery will correct it" he whispers and he hangs his head. I so badly want to move forward and comfort him, but I'm frantically blinking my own tears back. I was right that I was never going to speak again then. Somehow, it still hurts even though I was prepared for it. Damien hangs up the phone and rests his head against the wall. I waited a minute and then made a huge noise as I walked into the kitchen, Damien springing back and hastily wiping tears from his face.

"Winter," he says thickly as I pretend not to notice, "I was just about to organize dinner. What do you want to order?" he asks and I shrug. I don't really care, it makes no difference to me. To his credit though, he tries.

"Pizza again". I shook my head adamantly. I've never been a real fan of it.

"Chinese?"

Another shake of my head. Guess I care after all.

"Indian" I nodded excitedly. It's been forever since we had Indian food and I loved spicy food. He gives me a small smile and then sits at the dining table, motioning for me to sit as well, looking extremely pale and biting his lip.

"Winter" he begins, "I have to tell you something and it's not good news."

I already know what he's going to tell me but I don't interrupt, waiting for him to speak and watching as he wrestles with his conscience.

Finally, he clears his throat and looks away, unable to meet my eyes.

"The doctor called while you were still upstairs" he whispers, "and I'm really sorry but he says there's no chance of your vocal cords repairing themselves, they were too shredded in the attack."

I know this but my body slumps anyway. He reaches over and takes my hand and I let him, not used to this contact from him so often. I love him and it's killing me that he's feeling so wretched over it. Even when he beat me, with my father, I loved him as a big brother. It might seem weak of me, but I'd always hoped one day he'd realize I wasn't responsible for my mother's death and treat me like a little sister. Now my wish had come true and I was planning on abandoning him. God, I sucked as a person.

"We'll get through this" he was saying, squeezing my hand, and I nodded, my eyes shiny with tears. He sucks in a breath.

"I swear we'll look into another opinion, maybe another doctor can fix it" he suggested, and I gave him a small smile. Whatever made him feel better.

No doctor is fixing this. I'm not broken, I think to myself. There were plenty of people who were mute and who led perfectly happy lives. I could do the same. I don't need to be fixed. I hear my stomach growl and pat it as my brother gives a sniffle and a smile.

"I guess I had better order that Indian" he laughs, teasing me, and my heart fills with joy to hear him laughing again instead of looking so morose.

He gets on the phone and I lean back in the chair and listen, content to look out the window. One more week, I thought to myself. I could hide from Damien, I think, or I could spend as much time with him as I could before I left. Even though it stings, I decide the latter. I want to get to know my big brother but I wouldn't change my mind about leaving. I was doing what was best for both of us and getting away from Johnathon's overbearing attitude as well. I would be severing the mate bond permanently and possibly becoming a rogue, but it was my life and my choice. I need freedom, and I wasn't going to get it here.

Chapter 26 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

It's the day before my eighteenth birthday and it completely slipped Damien's mind. He's been too upset and distraught over the fact I'll never speak again, to even give it a thought. Johnathon continues to slip through the corridors and follow me from class to class. If he wasn't an Alpha, he'd be in detention for being so late to his own. That also reminds me. I wonder how on earth he

was expelled from two other schools. Who would dare expel an Alpha? It boggles my mind.

I'm so busy staring out the window, lost in my daydreams and plotting, that I fail to notice the last school bell has rung and that everyone, almost everyone, has left. Except for me. How could I have been so stupid? The only reason Jessica and her cronies had stayed away was because of Johnathon and Damien. Everyone had noticed them following me. I gulp as I look at her and the small group of friends that have gathered in a crowd around my desk. Where the hell was Johnathon and Damien when I actually needed them for heaven's sake?

Jessica leans over, her long blonde hair trailing over her shoulder as she pushes it back impatiently. "You know you never got punished for Killing Thomas" she murmurs to me, "the police just let it go but I know that you're a murderer. Thomas was our friend and because of you he's dead" she snaps, her eyes flashing black for a moment. Just like me, she's close to her eighteenth birthday and her wolf is dangerously close to the surface.

I shake my head. Thomas deserved to die. I wanted to cry out, protest, after everything he'd tried to do to me. But, of course, I can't utter a sound as she laughs and motions toward her group.

"Get her" she orders, and I push back my chair and try to run, muffled screaming coming from my mouth as someone pulls at my hair, dragging me to the floor, my back hitting the hard wooden floor. They drag me to the doorway and I glance through, my heart sinking as I see the corridor is completely deserted.

"Your brother and Damien have been delayed for a bit", Jessica laughs and I flinch. She knew exactly what I was thinking, but what would have distracted them both from coming to my side? It had to have been something extremely important.

One of the boys, whose name, I strangely don't remember, grabs me and roughly begins to shove me toward the door. The girls surround me and I'm stuck, going in the direction they are motioning to. I start to panic, my chest heaving frantically, as I see where we are going. The forest where the trees will hide me from sight and I wave my arms wildly, kicking and scratching as they pull me with them until we are a fair distance inside.

Ouch. That stung. Jessica took great delight in kicking me to the ground, my body rolling on the hard wooden dirt, leaves, and debris all over me and even tangled in my hair as I lay there, looking up at them all as they gathered in a circle around me. They are all smiling and enjoying this. No compassion or empathy in them at all.

"We decided we would punish you for murdering Thomas, seeing that the police aren't interested."

I began to shake in fear. What was this? Clearly, it was revenge and it was going to be brutal. I had no doubts about that.

Another kick and I curled up into a fetal position, each of them taking turns to kick or spit on me. It's the most humiliating and degrading experience of my life and tears flow down my cheeks. Why can't I just be left alone? I'm so close to leaving all of this behind me. One more night and I would have been gone from their lives forever.

Something glints in the light and my eyes, which are bleary and narrowed, focus on a dagger being held by Jessica. She's wearing gloves and I know instinctively that means the blade is a silver blade. I flinch and crawl backward, scrapes and bruises stinging all over my body, my shirt and pants covered in dirt, and even some of my blood splatter.

"Mmmm" I tried to say. But this just makes them giggle.

"Do it already. Her brother and fucking Johnathon will be here soon. Come on" the other boy urged, looking over his shoulder nervously. I glare at them all, the girls pushing me back down, every time I try to get to my feet.

There's a broad smile on Jessica's face and it's chilling to see. I feel cold inside, numb. As though I'm not even inside my body but outside of it, watching everything going on at a distance.

"Hold her" she snaps and both boys drag me upright, holding me firmly as I struggle wildly, watching Jessica approach, the blade glinting in the sunlight.

She stops right in front of my face and, with no hesitation, she drives it into my thigh, my screams muffled as the silver begins to burn my flesh. God, it hurt. It was excruciating and made worse by the fact she kept it there, instead of yanking it out straight away.

I whimper. She yanks the dagger out and then looks at my ribcage, a calculating look in her eyes. She stabs me and the only reason I'm up right now is that the boys are holding me up, otherwise I would have collapsed to the floor in pain right now.

"This is for Thomas" Jessica whispers furiously, as I stare at her weakly, blood dripping down my body, the dagger held securely in her palm. "This is for turning Damien against me" she utters, stabbing me again "and this" she hisses, my body slumping now, the boys loosening their grip as they realize I'm barely conscious "is because Johnathon still wants you, you pathetic little bitch" she finishes with one last stab. She pulls it out, the boys leaving me to collapse on the floor, my hands pressed against my wounds. She spits at me one last time and the others follow suit. Then I hear them leaving as I gasp for breath, my breath coming in short spurts as I try to drag in oxygen.

I struggled to my feet. I could go back and tell Damien what happened, or I could bring my plan forward a notch. I'm afraid they might come back and even though I feel myself staggering and barely holding on, I start to walk even further into the forest. No one knows it but there's a cave nearby, one that I've found and spent time in whenever I need sanctuary and that's where I head to now. I need somewhere to hide and the stream close by will hide my scent. All I have to do is get there and make sure that my blood trail doesn't betray me. Sorry, Damien, I think hazily to myself, I just can't take it anymore. You'll forgive me for this one day. Or at least I hope he will, as I use the trees to steady myself, forcing each step forward. Just a little more and I can rest. Just a little more.

Chapter 27 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Damien POV

"I know that it seems a long time away boys, but you really do have to think about your future" the headmaster is saying in that annoyingly nasal voice of his. I fight the urge to roll my eyes, wanting nothing more than to poke my tongue out at him. Johnathon is sitting beside me, looking just as frustrated, but the headmaster is the one person I can't go against without being suspended or expelled.

Who gives a damn about the future, I think a bit bitterly. Winter's had been ruined and it had been one of my friends who'd done it to her. I wasn't stupid. She tried to hide it from me but I knew she was having nightmares every

night. I heard her muffled gasps when she woke up. I still stayed outside her room every night and I knew she was annoyed by it. I guess I've gone from being a disinterested older brother to an overprotective one in a short amount of time. Who would have thought it?

"You need to think about college and where you are going. What grades are you going to need?" God, he was rambling on and on. Was he ever going to shut up? How much longer was I going to have to sit here and listen to him, for heaven's sake?

"Johnathon, have you chosen a college yet?"

"No" Johnathon answers sullenly and we share a look, one that sympathizes with the other. It's clear neither of us is particularly thrilled to be sitting in the headmaster's office.

"Damien, what about you?"

"I'm not going to college, I need to get a job", I answered politely and the headmaster seemed confused by my answer.

"You have to go to college. It will set you up with a bright future", he tells me sternly and I shrug, not caring if it's rude.

"I also need to eat and have a roof over my head" I commented dryly. Ha, take that, I think smugly to myself. He sits back and regards me thoughtfully. What does he know?

"I heard your father has disappeared," he says, trying to be delicate and failing abysmally.

"Yep, and I intend to take care of myself and Winter," I said carelessly, and he looked a bit guilty for a moment. What was that about?

"How is your sister doing?"

I blinked back the tears threatening to come to the surface. "I don't know. Sometimes she seems to be fine and dealing with everything and then other times not so much", I admit, hating myself for showing weakness in front of the headmaster and in particular Johnathon, who's hanging on my every word, his face serious and his eyes trained on me.

"Will she recover her voice?" the headmaster probes, his eyes gentle and trained solely on me. I reluctantly shook my head and saw a disappointed look on Johnathon's face. I hadn't had a chance to tell him. Alright, I did, but I'd held back from telling him because I didn't feel like it was any of his business once he'd rejected her. Not that you could tell an Alpha that directly without getting your head ripped off.

"No" I whispered and the headmaster looked saddened by the news but also not surprised. I guess I was one of the only ones who'd hoped that she would. Maybe I'd let my imagination run away from me as a means to cope.

"Look," the headmaster said, looking between Johnathon and myself, "if you both decide on a college, I can help you or the guidance counselor. Damien, if you or your sister need help, then we can arrange for social services if that would be easier. You just have to say the words", he adds, and I stare at him, absolutely incredulous. Did he really think I would let social services take my sister from me? Over my dead body, I think fiercely, scowling at him.

"Can I leave now?" I say snidely and he blinks at me, as though wondering why I'm suddenly so angry.

"Certainly," the headmaster says pleasantly, looking at the clock. The old man had kept us in the study for close to a bloody hour with his driveling. I needed to get the hell out of there.

"Thank you," I said, forcing myself to be polite as I stood up, grimacing and shaking his flabby hand while Johnathon did the same. We leave the study in a rush, breathing in the fresh air in relief. The office had smelt damp and of cigarettes. We knew the man smoked, he absolutely reeked, but I guess when you're the head of the school you can get away with anything you want. Like I care.

I know exactly where Winter's class is, but I'm not shocked to find that she's not waiting for me. I should have sent word about the meeting but the headmaster had grabbed me on the way to her in the hallway and I hadn't been able to refuse. Johnathon gave a huff and I cast him a sidelong glance. What was his problem?

"She's long gone," he says, sounding disappointed. I rolled my eyes. He's bloody obsessed with winter and it was becoming annoying. Especially with him being an Alpha.

"Can you blame her" I snapped back in response. "I wouldn't have waited for a whole hour either. She's probably walked home" I mutter and he sighs. I couldn't hold it in anymore, I felt like I was going to explode and I turned to him in a rage.

"Listen, you need to stop with this bullshit man. You rejected Winter. Remember" I vent, not holding back ". You didn't want her and now you follow her around like a bloody puppy. It's annoying. She's my sister and I'm the one who should be protecting her."

He blinks, shocked that someone would speak to him like that. I guess no one tells you the truth when you're an Alpha, but man, could he get a hint for heaven's sake? Winter wanted nothing to do with him.

"The mate bond didn't completely sever" he mutters and my jaw almost drops to the ground in disbelief. How could that happen? The wheels began to turn in my head. "The only way that happens," I said slowly, the penny beginning to drop "is if you're not a hundred percent certain you want to reject the person." I glared at him.

"Are you telling me that you weren't a hundred percent sure? Because if that's the case, then you're going to feel everything on your side, whereas Winter won't feel anything except maybe a strong like for you."

He looks at the ground miserably and I feel a small spurt of sympathy for him. A very small one. "I know" he whispers, "I fucked up okay. I either need to reject her fully or choose her as my mate. This still being tied to her is slowly killing me."

We both give each other an understanding glance and I watch him leave, feeling more of a kinship with the Alpha, who seems to be haunted by a decision he had made.

Chapter 28 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Winter POV

The cave is small, dark, and dank. It reeks of some sort of animal's piss but it's well hidden and camouflaged. I'm fairly certain it's not bear piss at any rate and, for all I know, the creature it belongs to has moved on. I lean against the rough, hard, rocky edges and let myself slowly slip down to a sitting position, both my legs right in front of me. I can't move, my shirt is plastered to my side

where all the stabbing marks are and I feel hot and feverish all over. It still stings even now and I slowly peel up my shirt to have a proper look. My eyes, thankfully due to my shifter genes, are able to see quite well in the dark.

The blood has stopped dripping, thankfully, and from what I can see the wounds have started to scab over. I closed my eyes in relief. If I'd had my wolf, the silver would have had an even bigger impact than it had. It's cold in the cave and I shiver slightly as I let my shirt fall back down. I'd bent down to drink from the stream and almost collapsed right there and then from the pain. My trail, however, has been hidden and I know I'm safe for a little while at least before I need to move on.

I wonder what Damien's doing, whether he's even realized I'm missing yet. It's been over an hour since school finished, so he should have some sort of inkling by now. I feel a moment of regret that I'm choosing to leave him like this. I have written a note but I was supposed to leave it in the kitchen for him tomorrow and it's safely tucked away in my little desk. Maybe he'll find it? He'd have to search my room though. Had Johnathon felt my pain? Then again, I guess he shouldn't, not with our mate bond severed. That, I guess, is a small blessing in itself. It means I have more of a chance of getting away.

It begins to rain outside and I sigh. I've always loved the rain and the way it made the pine seem even stronger when you smelt it and the soothing sounds as it hit the trees and the ground. Even when there was thunder, I'd always been fascinated. I inch back further into the cave, swearing silently to myself as my body protests, all my muscles feeling like they are on fire. I might like the rain, but right now the last thing I need is to get soaked to the bone, even if I consider that it might make me feel slightly cooler.

I stood there, keeping an eye out for any signs of wild creatures coming close, my ears strained for any strange noises. It seemed to be clear and I relaxed slightly, still panting from the pain, my eyes blurred, everything hard to focus on. I feel exhausted, drained, and completely lacking energy. Who could blame me? I doubt anyone wants to run a marathon after being stabbed. Or move at all.

The rain stops just like that and I crane my neck, seeing that the sun is beginning to set. That means that there are only a few hours until it gets dark and that means it's going to get extremely cold in the cave. I shiver, wishing I had a blanket or even a damn jumper on. How was I supposed to know I was going to need it? It was a perfectly sunny day this morning. My shirt has rips and tears through it and I sigh. It was one of my favorites too. Just my luck. I

don't even dare think of heading home to get spare clothes. Damien would freak and then he'd never let me out of his damn sight again. It's best not to risk it.

I huddle against the wall and bring my legs up slowly, wincing as pain reverberates through my entire body. Heat seems to flare through me and I moan, muffled, my hands and legs feeling shaky and my body trembling all over. Was it my imagination or did the cave seem to be well, longer? The distance to the entrance or exit seemed to be further away, but how was that possible?

I closed my eyes tight, my head dropping back against the wall with a thud. Everything hurts. It wasn't an easy task getting to the cave and at one point I was certain I wouldn't make it and contemplated going back for help. The sound of twigs and leaves crunching beneath footsteps makes my head whip back up, my eyes blearily looking toward the entrance. I'm in no position to run or fight off whoever is coming and I begin to shake. Please don't let it be a wolf or a bear, come to eat me. It's not the way I envision dying.

Whatever it is, thankfully, he has no interest in the cave whatsoever, and my head pounding and my lips and throat dry, I quietly lean back against the wall. If I'm lucky, I'll be safe inside here for the next few days or however long it takes to heal. In fact, even if I hold on until tomorrow night, I'll be able to shift. It will be my first one as well, considering it's my eighteenth birthday, but my god, that was going to be useful in this situation.

I can't wait to see what my wolf looks like. It's hard to picture her, but I imagine a delicate, silver or gray-looking wolf with big eyes and a cute adorable tail. I wish I could speak to her, but that only happens after your transformation, so I'll have to wait a little longer. I can be patient though, especially since it means I won't have to be alone, not so long as I have my wolf with me. The moon will be full tomorrow night and it will light up the forest. It's the perfect opportunity to go for a run and leave the space. All I have to do is reject my pack and I'll be known as a rogue, a wolf who has no pack or home and merely travels in search of one or remains on their lonesome. Some go crazy from lack of company and others choose to go bad. I won't though. Because part of me is hoping that I'll be able to find a pack to call home, one that's vastly different from this one, where I can make a new start and a new life. One where I finally feel accepted for who I am and one where I'm a valued pack member. Does such a pack exist? Or am I dreaming?

I started to feel nauseous and promptly threw up next to me, wiping my mouth in disgust, my wounds smarting with every move. I wrinkle my nose at the smell, which is disgusting by the way, and back away slightly, the cave feeling like it's spinning around me until I'm so confused I don't even know which way I'm moving. My eyes begin to close and my head throbs like you wouldn't believe. I try to hold on but before I know it, my body has dropped completely to the ground and I welcome the darkness that obliterates me.

Chapter 29 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Damien POV

I've just gotten home and it's still dark inside, none of the lights having been turned on. I swear and turn on the kitchen light and go looking for Winter. The least she could have done was light up the house, especially since I can see rain clouds gathering and it's so dark inside the house that it's difficult to see clearly. But when I go upstairs there's no sign of her. Perhaps she's in the bathroom, I think, and go and check. Then I checked each room methodically, calling out her name. There's no sign of her anywhere and I feel dread rise from the pit of my stomach. Something is wrong, I just know it.

"Shit" I swear. So she hadn't walked home by herself after all as I had assumed. What had happened then? I don't know why, but I began to search her room, in case she'd left some sort of sign about where she might have gone. I don't think Jessica and her cronies would have the guts to do anything to Winter, especially against Johnathon's wishes. I also know sometimes she likes to be alone. I'm not sure where, but every so often she'd slip out and come back hours later, a small smile on her face. Like her own personal haven that only she knew about. Her own little sanctuary, away from father and me.

I rifle through her desk and that's when I see the envelope, with my name written on it in neat cursive writing. My hand is shaking as I pull it out and I quickly rip the envelope open as I sit down on her bed. It's a letter addressed to me and, with my heart in my throat, I begin to read it.

Dear Damien

If you are reading this, then it means I've done what I planned to do and left. It's nothing against you, but I can't bear the thought of staying in this pack any longer. I've never truly felt like I belonged here anyway.

I'm afraid, every day Damien. Initially, it was because it was either you or our father taking your frustrations out on me, always looking over my shoulder, wondering which of you is going to hit me next, and what would I do to upset you. It has become the norm when it's anything but normal. You were my family and you both treated me like garbage. Instead of the daughter and sister that I was.

I know you're trying to make up for it all. You've started being the older, bigger, brother I always wanted, but it's too late. The pack hates me. I'm never safe, not even at school. The Luna and Alpha don't even know of my existence because of where we live and the students in the school love to bully me because they saw you bullying me at school.

I'm sorry for being such a coward and not telling you, but I was afraid you would try and stop me. I don't want to be stopped. I need to do this, Damien. I've wanted to leave ever since Johnathon rejected me straight away. I'm never going to find happiness while I live here, or even love. I want what our mother and father had before she died. They loved each other unconditionally and they were always affectionate in front of us. If father hadn't changed, maybe we would have stayed a happy family instead of being such a dysfunctional one.

I'm sorry that our mother died because of me, but it wasn't my fault, and honestly, you blamed me anyway. Damien, even when you hit me, or punished me, I still loved you. I've never stopped loving you as my brother. But I want a life for myself. I want to live in a pack that cares about me as a person and who accepts me for who I am. Where I can be myself without having to look over my shoulder or worry about being bullied as I walk down the halls of the school. Where I don't need you or Damien to keep watch over me while I attend class.

I need to be free, Damien. While I stay here, it's like I'm stuck in a cage, unable to be free and unable to leave. I know that losing my voice permanently has made things harder for both of us, but I'm willing to accept that I'll be mute forever. I'm not broken. I didn't need to be fixed, all I needed was the love of a brother, that was all. That was what you gave me Damien, and I'm so incredibly thankful for it.

Do me a favor. Take care of yourself and don't worry about me. Don't go looking for me. I've already made up my mind and you can't drag me back. Let me do this. Let me live again. When I find a place to call home, I'll send for you. I won't forget about you. But I need to take this time and travel and be

independent instead of relying on other people. I need to find myself and discover what I want for once instead of people choosing for me. I need to get away from the memory of Thomas and what happened. I can't do that here.

I love you so much and I hope one day you'll forgive me for leaving you like this. But I couldn't bear to see your face if I told you. This just seemed the easier way.

I'll see you again one day.

Love your little sister, Winter xoxoxo

I crumpled the piece of paper in my fist. This was my fault. I'd driven my little sister away and god it killed me inside to know it. She'd been having a hard time at school and at home because I had been so much like my father towards her. Now she'd run off to find another pack and part of me honestly couldn't blame her. I'm actually surprised she didn't go sooner. Life had been hell for her and it was partly due to me.

I debated going after her, but then I felt a sense of remorse and defeat. She'd said not to go after her, had written it implicitly, and who was I to go against her wishes? This one time, it felt like I needed to listen to what she wanted, not what I thought she should do. If she needed time to travel and to heal, that's what I should give her. It's the least she deserves and she has every right to demand it. Even if I feel cold inside. Anything could happen to her out there but from the sounds of it, she was in more danger staying. It's the most difficult choice I've ever had to make, fighting the urge to go and find her, let alone dragging her back. She needed this. I had no right to make her even more miserable than she apparently already was.

I throw the piece of paper away and bury my face in my hands. I felt tears slowly trickle down my cheeks and I let them. I feel broken inside. I had just lost my baby sister who was god knows where, in one afternoon and I was partly to blame. So was Johnathon. Shit. I forgot about Johnathon. I glanced down at the discarded paper in trepidation. I was going to have to tell him about the letter and I knew, just knew, that it was not going to go down well with the big bad Alpha.

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Chapter 30 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Johnathon POV

I'm not going to lie, I'm fairly concerned about Winter. I mean, she could have at least waited for us to escort her home for heaven's sake. As it is, it's the next morning and I'm impatiently waiting by the gate to see her and that blasted annoying brother Damien of hers. Alright, maybe Damien's not that bad, but he is still annoying. There are other students trickling in and I ignore the looks, the curiosity on their stupid faces. I only have one person I'm interested in seeing and that's Winter. No one else. I ignore the small voice in my head that reminds me I rejected her and have no business being this protective towards her.

So, when Damien slowly comes trudging through the crowd, I'm puzzled to see he's all alone, instead of with his sister Winter. Had he left her at home? All by herself? I feel my anger rising and I shove through everyone, the others scattering out of my way. Good. Damien looks up and I swear he's been crying, his eyes are all red and puffy, and there are dried tear tracks on his cheeks. It's unnerving to see a young man as tough as him in such a mess. Had something happened to Winter? I began to feel a sense of panic. No, don't let it be that, let it be something else, anything else. Surely I would have felt something through the mate bond by now? Or was the mate bond now that weak?

"We need to talk," Damien said in a low voice, and I grabbed his jumper and fairly dragged him into the school building and into an empty classroom, before releasing him.

"Talk" I snapped, crossing my arms and glowering at him "where the hell is your sister Damien? Where is Winter?"

He hesitates and my eyes turn pitch black in warning as he gulps and looks away, too frightened to look me in the eyes. My impatience is mounting.

"She ran away" he finally said, and for a minute I stood there in disbelief, unable to comprehend it. He had to be joking. Winter was one of the most stubborn girls I've ever seen. She wouldn't have just left. I refuse to believe that. But a small part of me thinks that it's true.

"Explain" I boom as he flinches from the tone of my Alpha voice. He cringes as he sits in a chair, looking defeated and more than a little miserable.

"She left a note" he whispered, "saying that she couldn't bear to stay here any longer. I guess the bullying finally got to her", he explains, and I feel like throttling him. I knew Winter had been bullied but I'd believed the students had stopped when I put the word out. Had my wishes been disrespected? I'd kill anyone who dared touch her. I'd make it my personal mission to make their lives a living hell.

"I'll kill them" I declared, but Damien shook his head at me.

"It doesn't matter anymore" he exclaims, waving his arms around in his distress, "she's gone, Johnathon, and she's not coming back. Because of me" he hisses, "and father, she left, she wants to find a pack to call home", he sniffs, "because this one has only caused her suffering and misery."

I'm silent for a moment. I never realized just how much Winter was going through and how much I must have made it worse by trying to reject her. All I'd cared about had been myself and what I wanted.

"We have to find her," I said in desperation, and Damien began to laugh. It's almost like he's hysterical.

"She's long gone. I won't go against her wishes, not when this is what she wants. I've already done enough to destroy her,, I won't take this away from her as well", he snaps, and I glower at him.

"You would leave your sister out there, alone, where anything could happen" I scoffed, and he shrugged, looking down at the floor.

"I would leave my sister out there to discover who she is and find a pack that loves her, a place that is a sanctuary to her, rather than try and drag her back and make her miserable again" he explains, and I look away, my jaw tight.

Why couldn't I have just been decent to the poor girl? I could have given her a chance before dragging her out of a classroom in front of other students and rejecting her. Of course, she would have been teased for that. Her life must have been hell and I'd added to it without even being aware of it. I feel a pang in my heart and my wolf is heartbroken. Our mate has abandoned us and I'm not stupid, I know there's every chance that she might come across a second chance mate in her travels if she went to various packs. That hurts and I feel cold at the thought.

"You shouldn't have rejected her," Damien tells me hollowly. "I think it was the last straw for her, you know. Like she wasn't worthy of being loved. I messed up big time but you, you were like the final nail in the coffin."

I exhale. He's not wrong. If she was already fed up with everything, then I'd clearly made her want to run away. I feel a sense of remorse and regret my actions, even if it's too little, too late. My wolf blocks me and I have to say that stings too. We're normally the best of friends, but not lately.

"I stuffed up but there's nothing I can do to change it now" I say, just as miserable. "For what it's worth, Damien, I am sorry", I offer, and the boy merely stares at me.

"What are you going to do now? You still have the mate bond but it's not going to do you any good now that she's gone", Damien points out, and I wince at his directness. This blasted mate bond. I am considering my options. I could go search for my mate and find her or I could do the right thing and let her go completely. My heart wants to find her, drag her back kicking and screaming, but that would just be torture for her. I took a deep breath. Damien looks at me expectantly, my wolf sends me vibes of utter hatred. But this needs to be done. Winter deserves to be happy, she deserves to find someone who can give her all of their heart rather than a small part of it. She deserves to be cherished and adored and she deserves to feel safe. I'm not that person. I'm too indecisive and I constantly struggle with the idea of accepting her mate. Hopefully, her other one, should she find it, will accept her without question.

I took a deep breath. This is going to hurt far worse than anything I've ever faced. "I Johnathon of the blue moon pack fully reject Winter from the silver crescent pack as my mate, now and forever", I finished in a whisper. This time the pain is so bad, my legs buckle and Damien rushes to catch me. My entire chest is on fire and my heart is beating rapidly. Then, just as quickly, it fades away and I know this time, the mate bond is gone completely, that there's no small sliver left behind.

"It's done", I tell him regretfully "I got rid of it for real this time."

Damien looks slightly upset but gives a nod. "It's for the best", he says, and I agree, even if my heart continues to hurt at the loss of a mate.

Be free Winter and good luck finding another mate. I think to myself as the bell rings and I make my way to the classroom. I hope you find whatever it is you're searching for.

