

## Chapter 8 - The Alpha's Rejected Silent Mate

Johnathon POV

I'm hurrying to the car, aware of Winter's condition. She might seem tough, but right now she looked like a strong wind would knock her over. The car is too far for her to walk to and I get in and drive around to the front of the hospital, violently hoping she hasn't tried to leave on her own again. I can't believe she tried to do that. She's absolutely mad and the most stubborn girl I know and I've only known her a few hours.

To my relief, she's still where I left her, and I wait, the engine running, for her to come over and get in the passenger seat. I feel bad but if I try and help she'll just refuse again. Once she's firmly buckled in, I started to slowly drive off, asking her for her address. She answers but in a dull voice, as though frightened that I'm driving her home. I'm still suspicious of the bruises that litter her entire body, but I can't prove anything or help if she refuses to tell me.

"What do you do in your spare time?" I ask awkwardly and she shrugs. Great, she's going to be silent for the remainder of the trip. I tried again. "So how do you like school" and sighed when she just shrugged and turned to look out the window.

We get to her house and I make a move to help her out but, stubborn wench that she is, she waves her arms at me and tells me to stop. I'm not used to this kind of treatment from another shifter and my wolf is starting to get pissed off. Not because of her, but because she was refusing help. Even without the so-called mate bond, he remained concerned about Winter.

"Can you get to your house okay?" I called out as she slammed the door closed. I close my eyes and try hard to keep patient.

"I'll be fine," she says testily and I pull out, looking in the rearview mirror as she begins to shuffle away.

I don't trust her. There was something about the way she said it, and the way she hesitated before giving me her address that niggled at me. Instead of leaving, I traveled around the block and parked on a side street, cautiously making my way to a tree where I could see what she did clearly, without being so close she would be able to sense me.

As I thought, she shuffled right past the house she'd told me she lived in and hobbled further up the street to one of the most run-down and shabby-looking houses I'd ever seen. The grass is completely dead out the front and the mailbox looks as though it's been run over several times, completely on a lean. The front door's paint is peeling and there are empty beer bottles near the front door which she uses her foot to nudge away. I watch closely as she places a key in the lock. There's no emotion on her face, almost as though she's detached, but that could be due to her pain maybe?

She's clearly poor, I think to myself. Maybe that's why she didn't want me to drop her off. It made sense, but something still rankled. Why would she not at least tell the nurse about her old bruises? I don't believe for a second that it's due to bullies at school. There are far too many of them. As it was, I will be having a firm talk with the principal tomorrow about his failure to protect one of his students from a vicious and violent attack. The fact they were girls didn't matter to me. They deserved to be punished and as much as my wolf would have loved to get his hands on all of them, I had to let the school handle this.

Winter walks into the house and I hear a small thump as the front door closes and the click of a lock. Then nothing but silence. I wait, for what I don't know, eventually giving up. She was fine, probably doing homework. My wolf is still uneasy but I can't hang around forever. I make a note to swing past again tomorrow afternoon without telling her, if only to ease my own curiosity. Part of me wonders what her bedroom looks like, whether she has personal items in it or if it was as bare as the rooms in the house. I could see the living room from here and it contained one couch and an old TV on a crate for heaven's sake. Where were her parents? I could have sworn that someone had mentioned a brother as well, but Winter hadn't said one word about him.

I place my hands into my pant pockets and begin to saunter back towards my car, deep in thought. My mate or the girl who would have been my mate was in danger, and although I had rejected her, I couldn't bring myself to abandon her. Not now. I glanced back at the house and shivered. It seemed cold somehow, completely lacking in everything that makes a house a home. I get into the driver's seat and slowly pull out, careful to watch for oncoming traffic as I make my way back to the pack house. I suspect my mother is going to interrogate me the instant I get home, most probably worried out of her mind because I'm back late. I sigh. She's so overprotective of me like all mothers are. So why wasn't Winter's? Surely no mother would fail to see the bruises on their daughter's body? Did she have a mother? Now that I thought about it, Winter had muttered something about a father but not anything about a mother.

I groan. Stop thinking about her already, I scold myself, and my wolf just sniggers at me. Shut it, I tell him fiercely, but he just grins even more.

You didn't completely sever the mate bond. Strange. It only happens when you are not one hundred percent sure you want to reject someone. I guess you had some doubts huh Johnathon, he told me smugly and I scowled. Had I had the tiniest bit of doubt in my mind when I rejected her? Was there still a mate bond drawing me to Winter? Was my wolf telling the truth? There was no reason for him to lie though, and I pondered what to do now. I can't bring myself to reject her a second time, not when I was already thinking constantly about her. Besides, how do you tell someone your heart wasn't fully in the rejection without giving them some sort of sense of false hope? I will deal with it later. I pulled up at the pack house and looked into the angry, blazing eyes of my mother. I flinch. She looks pissed.