

CHAPTER 142

Winter POV

So much pain. It's intense. I feel like I'm burning up. The last thing I remember is being sedated by hospital staff. I stare blankly up at the ceiling. He's gone. He has to be. That pain was him dying and I remember my mother's words "I'm sorry, he didn't make it."

But how could Kai leave me like that? Abandon me? I thought he loved me. If he loved me, he wouldn't leave me to be all alone. I need him. Does he not know that? I can't live without him being by my side. I just can't.

Grief overwhelms me. I hear footsteps and then my mother's blurry face appears above me. She gives me a smile but I ignore it. I feel her hand stroking my hair. "Winter, honey" she murmurs, her own voice full of grief "I'm so sorry" she whispers.

I turn my head, tears trailing down my eyes and onto the sheet. Maybe if I pretend, for just a little while, that Kai is still alive, the pain will go away.

"Hey Winter" says another voice and Damien comes into view, pulling a chair up beside the bed, gripping my hand tightly, squeezing it gently. "I know you're upset and you don't have to talk, I just want to be here with you. If you need something tell me, and I'll get it" he adds.

Damien always knows how to make me feel better. He knows right now that I don't want to talk. Because to talk right now, would just end in more tears. I swallow and give him a shaky smile, my body trembling on the bed. I wonder where Drake is or Langdon. Maybe they are together. Then

I realize that Langdon would be full of grief as well. Kai was his Alpha, as well as his best friend. He would need comforting as well.

I curl up into a tighter fetal position. I hear my mother sigh as she strokes my hair. "So young" she murmurs "the pain will fade eventually Winter, but you can't give in to it and let it destroy you. It will kill you, if you let it."

"Let her grieve" my brother booms at her, shocking me and almost making me jump in fright "she can take time for that mother. She loved Kai and he loved her. It wasn't like what you had with that man" he said in disgust.

Mother's hand pauses. "I never said it was" she said hurt "just that I know how it feels to lose someone."

Please, I think to myself, please don't fight in front of me right now. I can't take it. I don't want to be stuck in the middle between them. Not right now. I don't have the energy for it, let alone the inclination to stop them.

My brother makes a grunting noise, but thankfully lets it go. Mother goes back to stroking my hair.

"Do you want a water or something sweetheart?" she offers.

I shake my head. Food and water are the least of my concerns right now. Or blood. I wonder where Sabriel is but she's silent, grieving her way, or at least that's what I'm hoping.

Damien eyes me carefully but says nothing, leaning back in the chair, my hand still held tightly in his. God, I hope he never lets it go; it's a small comfort to me.

Then it bursts out of me, in a fury. "This is my fault, it's my fault that Kai's dead" I shriek out loud, curling up tighter "I should have stopped, I should have killed her straight away. Kai would be alive if it wasn't for me" I sob, " I killed him, my god I killed him."

"You didn't" Damien tells me gruffly, moving to kneel in front of my watery eyes "Winter, he should have stayed on his guard more. He put himself in danger. You're not responsible for his death. Blaming yourself is only going to make it worse. Trust me, you didn't do it."

I don't believe him. Damien is just saying it in an attempt to make me feel better. It's nice of him, but it fails to placate me. My mother continues stroking my hair, as though that's all she can think of to do.

"Langdon must hate me" I murmur "I don't blame him if he does. I killed his best friend." My voice catches as I begin to cry even harder.

"Langdon doesn't hate you" Damien said softly "Winter, please stop" he pleads "stop with the self-blaming and hatred. It's not going to help. You need to be strong right now. Alright. Sabriel needs you to. She must be hurting something fierce. Both of you need to help each other."

My tears slowly start to subside. But they don't fully stop. They'll probably never stop.

"But what do I do now Damien?" I whisper, staring at him, my mother listening but not speaking "what am I supposed to do without him there?"

He sighs. "You start by grieving Winter, like any normal person. Then eventually, you start to put your life back together, one step at a time. You're not alone" he points out, "you have me, you have mother" I swear that was sarcasm in his voice when he said that "you have Drake and you have Langdon for starters."

"Where is Kai?" I ask sniffing "I want to see him."

Silence. Damien looks as though he's debating what to say. His jaw tightens and he glances up at mother, who seems to have gone pale and ashen.

"Where is he?" I burst out, frantic, sitting upright as Damien catches me "which room?" I'm heedless of my actions now, wanting to go to my mate, not even thinking straight.

"Hang on Winter" Damien says, as I try to get up. "You can't go down there."

I stare at him confused. "Go down where?" I say impatiently.

He glances away. "You can't go down to the morgue" he finally utters "it's not allowed Winter.'

The morgue. They had put my beloved Kai in the morgue. My whole-body shakes. I had thought maybe, he would be in a hospital room, not thinking logically. I pale, and look at my brother, feeling sick to my stomach. My mother sees it and grabs a wastebasket just in time, putting it to my mouth as I vomit up my stomach contents. Not that there's much. My shoulders heave as I clutch at the wastebasket like a lifesaver.

My brother looks green. He's never really had a stomach for someone being sick. But he valiantly stays where he is. Mother pushes my hair back so that I don't get vomit in my hair.

"I'm sorry" I mutter miserably " I didn't realize that they would have. . ." I trail off.

"It's okay" Damien says quietly "maybe we can ask about going down there later."

Mother glares at him, he raises an eyebrow at her.

I try to rally myself. Kai would want me to be strong, I think to myself, he would want me to pull myself together. But my face crumples anyway. My heart hurts, my chest hurts. My whole being hurts. Part of me wants to beg for sedation again, so that I don't have to feel or I can just be numb.

But then I would just want it for longer and longer. It's dangerous to be numb, because then it's harder to feel.

There's a commotion and several nurses and security staff running through the corridors. Damien frowns, looking concerned. He glances at mother. "I'm going to go see what's going on" he says gently "mother stay here with Winter and neither of you leave this room" he adds firmly.

Mother opens her mouth to protest but then shuts her mouth. There's a look in my brother's eyes that say do not mess with me. She takes the hint and moves closer to me, Damien going out of the room and jogging in the direction of all the noise.

"What do you suppose is going on?" I ask weakly, mother taking the wastebasket and moving it away from me thankfully, the smell was getting to me.

"Who knows" she shrugs "probably a difficult patient needing to be held down or something. I'm sure it's nothing dangerous" she adds, seeing the look in my eyes.

I just nod and stare at the ground.

The commotion gets louder. Several screams and shouts. Mother begins to look worried. "Maybe I should at least close the curtains" she begins to mutter. Right. That makes sense. Curtains will definitely derail a crazy patient; I want to shout at her in disbelief.

"Stop" I hear Damien's voice shouting. Then a bunch of people yelling.

"Damn your brother for getting involved" Mother snaps "he should have stayed out of it. What if he gets hurt."

I say nothing. Damien can more than take care of himself. Even if mother hasn't realized that yet. I wipe my mouth with the back of my hand. Then wince. I hop off the bed on shaky legs.

"I'm going to go rinse out my mouth" I mutter, heading towards the bathroom connected to the room I'm in. Mother nods, looking grim. She looks nervous. But the commotion seems to have died down and I assume it was to do with a patient being difficult. Otherwise, I'm sure we would have been told otherwise by the nurses.

I stagger into the bathroom and turn the faucet on, dipping my hands under the water and cupping them, splashing my face. It's refreshing and it helps to wake me up some, as well as dry my tears. I cup my hands again and this time thirstily drink. I pat my hair a little. I barely recognize the girl in the mirror. My hair is different, a light shade of blonde that's almost white, my eyes are brighter, my skin is paler. Any other time I would have thought I was beautiful. But at the moment, all I could think was that it was strange to look this way, instead of a mess like I'm feeling. The vampire side of me detracted from looking like a slob. It was sad.

I swore I heard footsteps. But then I hear mother's voice, sounding slightly strangled. "Winter" she calls "can you come out please? There's um" she pauses, slightly hysterical "someone here to see you."

I don't want to see anyone else. I scowl at the mirror. Part of me itches to break it, hurt myself in a way, but I just clench my hands into a fist and then release it with a loud whoosh.

"Coming" I call, opening the door and then shutting it with a loud crash.

No, it can't be. My eyes are deceiving me. Either that or I've been dreaming this whole time, because of the sedative. Because I can't possibly be seeing this. But it's so real, so lifelike. My mouth drops open, my eyes widen. My mother is there, pale, a hand to her mouth. Is she seeing this too? Was I hallucinating? But I so desperately want it to be true. My heart gives a pang. A shiver runs down my spine. My feet are stuck to the floor, refusing to move, tears form back in the corner of my eyes. Can this really be?

He stares back, his eyes red, looking over me anxiously. I swallow, hard, feeling a lump in my throat. Then, without warning, my feet move, and I race towards him, flinging myself into his strong arms, my arms curling around his neck as I sob into his shoulder. It's him. It's really him. His hands grip me tight, holding me close to him. For a moment nothing is said, Sabriel exploding to life in my mind. She begins to howl, in happiness, the sound filling my mind.

"Is it really you" I whisper, sobbing.

"It's me" Kai answers "I'm back Winter and I'm never leaving you alone again. Do you hear me" he demands "never again."