

## CHAPTER 64

Damien POV

Crack, rustle. The twigs cracking beneath our feet were loud in the otherwise silent forest, but to be honest, we'd both reached the point of not caring, neither one of us giving a flying fig about the sounds or possible rogues. We're just that exhausted. Johnathon is definitely not the traveling buddy of my dreams.

Thomas hasn't stopped at every single pack as we both have, but both Johnathon and I are too worried about going in the wrong direction to avoid any of the packs along the trail we take. One wrong move and we could end up further away from Winter, instead of heading towards her like we initially planned. Every move we make we analyze. It's exhausting.

It hasn't been the smoothest of travels, not when Johnathon and I didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things. It doesn't help that the last few days and nights have been cold as well as rainy. Even wolves don't like to get wet and there was a storm brewing, judging by the dark black clouds gathering over our heads. Just what else we needed. I shiver slightly from the cold, feeling extremely frustrated.

"I think we should set up camp" I shouted out to Johnathon, my hair beginning to fly wildly in the wind. I hope he can hear me, otherwise, I'm going to have to mind-link the blasted Alpha.

He turns to look at me, as grumpy as ever. For an Alpha, you'd think he would be used to bad weather and travel. Apparently not.

"The pack up ahead is not too much further. I would rather spend time in a nice warm bed than sleep out here again in the bloody cold" he grumbles. Yeah, I don't think we're going to have a choice tonight.

I shot another glance upwards. "We're not going to make it, best to set up camp" I argue. The next pack is several miles away and we've spent the majority of the day in our wolf forms up until now. We need time to recuperate. Setting up camp is the best option for both of us, he just has to stop being so goddamn stubborn.

Besides, who made Johnathon the bloody boss? I didn't ask him to come along, he insisted. I can tell he's annoyed, but I don't care.

"Fine" he snaps irritably, pulling the tent out of the backpack as I join him. I'm already shivering from the cold and it's not even raining. At this rate, snow was going to be inevitable as well. I smiled at that. Winter loves snow and always has. I guess that's one of the reasons I always felt that her name suited her. God, how I miss my little sister.

"We're wasting time doing this' Johnathon grunts as he begins to pull the tent up. I rolled my eyes. I wish I could bury him in the snow, just for some peace and quiet.

A loud crash of thunder makes both of us jump. I give Johnathon a told you so look, which he pointedly avoids, scrambling now to get the tent up. We huddle inside, both pointedly keeping our distance from one another. As far as we can, considering it's a very small tent and we're both bulky teenagers.

"Do you think Winter found a pack to stay in?" Johnathon asks quietly.

I stopped to think for a moment. I hope she has. I want nothing more than to find her and find out she's finally happy. She's already been through so much, if anyone deserves to find true happiness, it's her.

"I hope so" I muttered as he fell silent.

"Maybe I shouldn't have rejected her" he murmured, presumably speaking to himself. "She wouldn't have run off then. I could have at least given her a chance" he says regretfully.

I'm staring at him in disbelief. Did he really think that this was all because of his stupid bloody rejection? That might be one piece of the puzzle, but I'm betting the bullying and the beatings had something to do with it as well. He really needs to get over himself. Besides, what the hell is he going to do when we find Winter? I can't exactly see her welcoming him with open arms. Actually, I don't even think she'll greet me with open arms. I wouldn't blame her though. Johnathon is an idiot. A big one.

"She would have left anyway," I say finally and he sighs, looking despondent and rather pathetic if I'm being honest. "She was bullied at school and was beaten at home. I'm amazed it's taken this long for her to run away from home and never look back. If it was me, I would have left a long time ago. But she's always been the stubborn type." My voice cracks and I glance away from him.

The wind picks up outside and I shiver, the tent not quite keeping all of the warmth inside or the wind from seeping in. Then the heavens opened and the rain began to pour down. Great. We were both stuck there with each other whether we liked it or not. At least outside we could keep our distance and not be offended. The tent was meant as an emergency one but it has been coming in damn handy lately, even if the Alpha snores so loudly, I'm frightened that wild animals will get curious enough to investigate the loud sounds. I can at least be grateful to Johnathon for

insisting we take a tent along. There's something to be said about not freezing to utter death.

My nose wrinkles. I can smell the dirt, pine, and the smell of the rain as it pours down, but I swear I'm picking something else up, something that we hadn't anticipated. Especially not in this weather. Fuck, I thought to myself with a groan. Not now. It smells absolutely putrid though and not something you can miss.

"Can you smell that?" I asked Johnathon and he nodded, grimly peeking out of the tent and scanning the woods.

"They might just be going through" he mutters to me, "at any rate they are still a fair distance away. Besides, they don't like the rain any more than we do, do they?"

Not exactly the right words to make me calm down. I'm trying to think positively, at least from the smell, there appears to be only one of them and there are two of us. That made the odds better on our side, especially with a ferocious Alpha. Heck, Johnathon could probably take them down on his own and never even break a sweat. That's what I'm telling myself anyway.

"The smell is getting stronger," I tell Johnathon nervously and he nods, his expression looking grim. Reluctantly, due to the rain and the cold wind, we were forced to step outside. If we shift inside the tent, we'll only rip it to pieces and we very much wanted the tent to stay intact. The smell of blood and rotten meat met my nostrils and I cringed. It was definitely coming closer. Was it looking for a fight? Because we'd give him one. But it was sheer stupidity on his part to approach an Alpha. Most rogues would have the sense to stay away, so why the hell wasn't this one? It was bloody infuriating.

Johnathon was busy cocking his head, listening for the sounds of the approaching rogue, his eyes wary as he glanced at me. I gave him a nod

and moved, keeping my back to him and trying to view this so-called rogue from a distance. He wasn't that far out that we shouldn't have been able to spot him. Especially with our shifter eye-sight. We can see for miles with it.

My mouth pops open, and I give Johnathon a nudge on his shoulder. He too stares in fascination. We're used to rogues being in their wolf forms and preparing to fight, and it actually takes us a moment to realize the man coming towards us was in fact one in human form. It was completely unexpected. If it wasn't for the smell and his glowing red eyes, we would have mistaken him for another shifter. A normal one.

The skinny, ragged-looking man holds his hands up as though surrendering. "I mean you no harm" he rasps as Johnathon and I glance at each other in surprise. "I have information, I believe you may want."

I'm suspicious. As if he's going to have any information, we want from him. What kind of rogue is this? I thought they attacked on sight, but this one really does seem to be harmless, even as I remind myself to remain on my guard.

"What do you think?" I whispered to Johnathon.

"I think we should hear him out" he answers quietly "I'm curious to know what kind of information he thinks we want to hear."

So am I. But I'm not about to forget that he's a rogue either. I'm not about to let myself be killed if I can help it.

"Come forward slowly," I told him, firmly. Johnathon tensed beside me, prepared to shift at a second's notice. The man gives me a small nod and walks very slowly, forward until we're meters apart. He keeps his hands up as though surrendering.

"What do you want for the information?" Johnathon asked. It was a good question. What did we have that the rogue could possibly want? Well, besides our blood, I think a little maliciously.

The rogue licks his lips. "Spare food and water" he croaks, and Johnathon grabs a water bottle and some food from our backpack and returns, throwing it to the rogue, who eagerly catches it in both hands. He drinks thirstily and I realize, due to his malnourished and skinny frame, that he clearly hasn't been able to have a decent meal or satiate his thirst in a good long time. I actually find myself feeling sorry for this dude. How unreal is that? I feel sorry for a rogue.

"What's the information," I ask and he pauses, and wipes the water dripping down his chin with one hand, even as we're still getting rained down upon. It must be a habit. Or a reflex.

"I heard you're looking for a girl, one who has been traveling alone," he says gruffly and my heart skips a beat. Could he possibly be talking about my sister Winter? I try not to get too excited. He could be lying after all, trying to get us to let down our guard.

"We might be," Johnathon says cautiously. "Why would you tell us?" He sounds curious rather than angry.

The rogue hesitates and looks a little shamefaced. 'If she's the one, I think you're looking for. She saved my life. I attacked her, desperate for food and she came out better off. Instead of finishing me off, she wrapped my wounds in bandages and left me some food to replenish my strength. She could have killed me. Hell, if I'd been in her position, I would have, but she chose to help me instead. She did me a kindness and I'd like to pay it back."

That sounds very interesting. Winter, of course, would have her wolf long by now. But it's curious she didn't kill the rogue. Most shifters didn't hesitate like she clearly had.

"Could she speak?" Johnathon yelled out to him and the rogue shook his head.

"No," he said decisively, and my eyes lit up. It has to be her.

"Where did she go?"

The rogue comes closer and we don't move to stop him. The information he has is too important to ignore and could very well lead us to my missing sister. Besides, he seems to be relatively harmless, especially for a rogue.

The rogue's eyes are twinkling. "I can do better than that," he says with a small smile. "I can lead you right to her. I kept an eye on her after she left me, and wanted to thank her in some way. Then I heard from other packs once I saw she was staying where she was, that there were some boys looking for her. One of them being her brother, the other an Alpha. Figures it had to be you."

"What's in it for you?" I asked suspiciously.

"If I take you to her," the rogue says quietly, "can you do something for me?"

"Depends what it is," Johnathon says.

"Tell her thank you from me. Once I've done this, I'm off to find a home, settle down and stop being a rogue. She gave me that motivation to change.'