

## Chapter 72

We all sat there: stunned.

Felicity confessed to us that I don't think anyone has ever done before. My heart broke for her. What could have happened at home so badly that she had to fake her death? And did it so well, *too*.

"You don't have to continue if you're not ready," Lukas whispered, and I completely agreed with him. Even though I assumed it had been years, this was far too personal. And if she wasn't ready to talk, then I'm sure we all could understand.

But instead, she shook her head and shuffled to the edge of the chair. "No, I have to," she insisted even though she was evidently uncomfortable.

"Okay." Lukas kissed her forehead, and she smiled up at him before continuing. Louie, who we all assumed already knew the story, simply held her hand tighter.

"I . . . I know it was a horrible thing to do—it was quite selfish, and I hurt A LOT of people. And I live with that burden every day. To everyone at home and every other friend I ever had, I was dead. I thought of going back. I thought of crawling at the doorstep and yelling 'April fools!' when I saw that being a rogue wasn't as easy as I originally thought. I thought that I'd die for real, trying to escape home."

"But why did you want to run away?" Fiona asked, seemingly taking the thought from all our heads.

Felicity shuffled with her fingers with a shrug. "I was a spoiled, privileged rich kid. I had everything I wanted growing up, and my parents adored me. So, I knew running away wouldn't cut it. My father . . . My father is like this: he loves his kids. He loves us with everything in him, but when it comes to the pack, we are sometimes second in line."

"I know the feeling," I mumbled as I dropped my gaze. Except, I didn't know what love actually felt like at all. The only priority of the pack.

"He believed that being an Alpha comes before being a mate and a father because he has hundreds of wolves depending on him. So, if he had to make a decision that would affect hundreds of people, he thought the sacrifice was worth it . . . Unless it would kill one of us—me, my brother and my mom."

Wow. I didn't even know she had a brother. It must've really been hard on them and on her with the entire death thing.

"Here's the part where I sound selfish, and you all will hate me." She laughed nervously as a series of protests filled the room.

I don't know about anyone else, but I couldn't hate Felicity.

"When I turned 18, I was thrilled because my dad always said I couldn't leave home until I was of age. Since my younger brother would someday take over the pack, I had nothing holding me back at home. I wanted to roam the wonderful world my mother would tell me about. I wanted to find my mate in the process." She paused with a smile in Lukas's direction.

They already looked so in love. My heart couldn't take it.

"But, when I asked my dad's permission, he said no. That was perhaps the first time in my life that I had heard no, so I didn't know how to respond. So, I ran away."

"Really?" I asked. That sounded so familiar.

"Well, I didn't leave the pack borders. I hid for two days and shut my mind link down so they couldn't communicate with me. Then, when I got starved, I went home, and my father was furious. I mean, I have never seen him so mad before. Like, ever."

"It must've been hard, huh?" Fiona asked as she rubbed her stomach, perhaps taking parenting notes from all of our messed-up childhoods.

Felicity nodded. "Even when he would choose the pack over us, I had never, ever seen him so detached from me. He went on and on about why kids should never grow up, and now he'd have to make the most impossible decision ever and send me somewhere where I would learn discipline."

Lukas wore a scowl as he asked, "Send you where?"

She gulped. "To Malum Pack."

We all gasped, and Fiona even almost fell from her chair. I stared at her wide-eyed, and so did everyone else.

The Primal Pack has always been known for their strength and power. But the Malum Pack—they were just downright evil. They killed their pack members for the simplest things and hung rogue heads on trees near the borders. Rumours have it people send their most juvenile wolves to Malum Pack, and most times, they don't even make it back home. Those who manage not to get killed return home shaking—never the same again. But that is no way to discipline someone. Traumatizing someone is not good.

I was threatened to be sent there about ten times growing up, but even as heartless as they seemed, my brother and Lance wouldn't do that to me.

"What kind of a father would send his daughter to a place like that?" Lukas snapped, evidently pissed.

He said that he stopped loving me the day I turned 18. I have no clue why. It's not like I chose to grow up. But I know my father. He's obsessed with the idea of having 'kids', not adults who'd want to leave him. And the worst part was since I'm an Alpha's daughter, he wanted to send me directly to the Alpha. And I've heard far too many horrid things of what that Alpha does to shewolves under his direct care."

He swiped away a fallen tear, but I allowed mine to fall as my heart broke all over again. I had no idea that she went through this.

Even though he had a mate of his own, the Alpha of Malum Pack was cruel and evil. Every wolf sent to him specifically either returned home pregnant or didn't return home at all because they ended their own lives. I can only imagine why.

Felicity thought we would think she's selfish for doing this? Hell, I would've done the same!

"I'd that son of a bitch acted so heartbrokenly when I went there," Lukas mumbled, evidently outraged. It was like he'd get up and go kill Felicity's father right now.

"That's my dad," she laughed, though there was so much pain behind her words. "Anyways, I cried for hours as I waited for my mother to talk him out of it. But she couldn't. When he made up his mind, there was no going back—none. So, I did what I thought was best. For days, I stole food, cash and anything I thought I'd need to survive. I barely packed clothes because that was the least anyways.

Then, one day, my brother came into my room. He was only fifteen at the time, and his eyes were bloodshot red. I could tell that he was crying. He pointed to my closet and closed the door behind him. Then he said, 'you know you won't be able to run away, right?' I was stunned. I didn't know he figured out that I was scavenging and planning to run away. But he was always a smart ass."

The pain in her eyes was evident. I could tell that she missed her brother a lot. Who knew that she was walking around with this much pain?

"I should've told him goodbye. In fact, he was the only one to who I wanted to say goodbye, but I didn't want him to know until I had one foot through the door." She wiped away her fallen tears and continued. "Anyways, he wasn't mad, only sad, for obvious reasons. He knew my father's intentions and even confirmed them when he saw a scout from Malum Pack visiting my dad that day. He knew they'd never stop searching if I ran away, and he was right. Yet again, I couldn't even move faster than the hundreds of wolves that he would've sent after me. And I could only imagine how much angrier he would be.

Villiam told me there was only one way to escape for sure, and that was through death. At first, I was heartbroken because I knew he was right. I knew the only way to escape was through death. I

would have to die. But that's when my genius brother thought of it." I was relieved to see a small smile pulling on her lips. "He planned my fake death down to the T and even orchestrated the entire body and scent thing. I won't go into the crude, horrible details." She shivered at the thought. "But we were able to pull it off.

"Of course, the day I 'died' was the day I had to be gone. So, my brother set the body in place, followed me to my escape route, and we spent at least two hours trying to say goodbye until we almost didn't." The tears were back, and Lukas held her tighter. "He saved my life, and I wish I could see him one more time to tell him how much I love him for what he did and to tell him that I'm alive. I made it."

Her chest shook with sobs now. She had been holding on so strong until now, but we all understood. Fiona and Louie were in tears as I gazed around, and even Leonardo's eyes glistened. To know that she had to endure so much pain and grief. It was heartbreaking.

I thought I had it bad, and maybe I did. But I never had to fake my own death. It was then that I noticed something. What was it with the Dalton brothers that had their mates surviving such harsh family drama?

"I..."

"Hey, you don't have to continue, Felicity," Lukas said, and I'm sure we all agreed. "You really don't. And you are not selfish. How could you think that you were?"

"Because I caused my mother pain. I caused my brother pain even if he helped, and as pathetic as it sounds, I caused my father pain. I could feel it all when I was miles away. By then, my brother would have revealed my 'death'. I had to forcefully break my bond with them to sell it once and for all, and most of all because I couldn't bear the pain that I knew they felt. I had friends and an entire pack who adored me. I hurt them with my fake death just so I could escape-

"The worst thing that could ever happen to a shewolf," I interrupted as I finished her sentence for her. "Felicity, don't you see? Your death was far better than whatever would've happened to you at Malum Pack, and that's why your brother helped you do this. If he believed that becoming a rogue would be better than living in that horrible place, don't you think your mom and everyone else would think the same?"

"At least you died with a sound and happy mind. At least you didn't have to endure months of torture only because your father couldn't bear seeing you leave him. I think his plan was that after a few months, you'd return home. You would never have to leave again because you'd be so traumatised and perhaps immobile. He'd continue getting to treat you like a child. Felicity, you are not selfish. Not even in the least."

She stared at me as if she didn't think about it that way before. But it was only the truth. Her mother and friends grieved, of course, but I knew that her mom was a tiny bit happy that she didn't have to endure what she would've if she was sent to Malum Pack.

Eventually, she dropped her gaze with a sigh, and I seemed like a huge weight had been lifted from her shoulders.

"Well, you might be right."

"She is right," Louie said. "I never thought of it that way either." She smiled at me, and I did the same as Felicity spoke again.

"I want to continue. The hardest part is out of the way."

"Are you sure?" Lukas asked.

She nodded with a returning smile. "I had to leave home through the bushes that were infested with thorns. No border patrol was there because they knew no rogue would be crazy enough to climb through three hundred feet of thorns. Well, I did, and I bled for days. My brother ensured I was padded. He gave me his winter jacket and pants. But some of the thorns made their way through the thick fabric and even tore it till it had no use anymore.

"When I was finally out, I had to pick them out of my skin that had already healed over them, much like Melissa's foot when she got that infection. It was painful, but I knew that was only the beginning of my pain. Within a week, all the things I packed were done, and my only means of surviving was finding a human town with actual food since I've never hunted and eaten raw meat. When I tried, I would puke for hours. I couldn't stomach it."

"I understand," I told her. There was a reason why I only fed on berries when I was out there. Raw meat is utterly repulsive to me.

"Yeah, well, I thought I'd die of hunger until I found a road. I followed that road to a small human town about three hundred miles away from home. Someone saw me and took me into their home. They nursed me back to health though she couldn't understand how my brises would heal too quickly. She fed me, clothed me and allowed me to work for her for extra cash."

"So what happened?" Leonardo asked, evidently more intrigued.

Felicity shrugged. "I'm a wolf. We have to shift, or our wolves would get restless. The forest wasn't far away, so I'd steal away on my lunch breaks and run in the forest. Some local residents claimed that there was a wolf in the forest, and some men went out to kill it, so I had to stop for a while."

"That must've been hard, huh?" I asked. I couldn't imagine life without shifting.

"Terribly hard. I lived there for a year. I even got my own place next to my friend. Her name was Veronica. Her kids were lovely. Honestly, I miss her so much." A smile lingered on her face, and it was refreshing. I don't think any of us had ever had human friends for obvious reasons. But the thought that Felicity knew them and lived with them was nice.

It was also good to know that she found somewhat of a family away from home. A year is a long time.

"So, why'd you leave?" Leonardo asked again.

She shrugged. "Because I'm a wolf. I couldn't shift because it got the residents antsy. They had kids who played in those woods and teenagers who stole away to make out and do teenage stuff there. I could understand why they'd need to kill the wolf."

"So you left."

"I did. I was honest with Veronica. She didn't believe me, so I showed her. She was scared of me for days, but we were neighbours so she couldn't ignore me. A few days before I left, she knocked at my door and ran away." Felicity laughed at the memory—a real full-on laugh. "It was a huge box of necessities and a note that read 'Say goodbye before you leave'. So, I did. It was the second hardest goodbye for me, and I promised her that one day if I don't die, I'd visit."

"And she was okay with keeping your secret?" I asked. I mean, we can't have the humans coming after us in fear that we'd kill them all. It's why we keep ourselves hidden.

"Oh, of course. She promised, and I trusted her. Besides, who would even believe her?"

"You got a point," I mumbled, and everyone else hummed in agreement.

"The things I had lasted me a month this time. I took a train, and I rode it for days, trying to find the best place to live. I was once again alone, and I was missing home—my two homes. When I was back in the forest, it wasn't easy. I was attacked by other rogues. I was ambushed, and the last of my food was stolen. I was beaten and left for dead."

Lukas growled with a deadly look in his eyes as if he'd hunt down every rogue and kill them. Felicity rubbed his shoulder, which calmed him a bit.

"It was in those hard months living as an actual rogue that I thought about going home, I couldn't go back to Veronica. We were far too different, and I had to shift. And I couldn't live as a rogue. I'd surely die if I did."

"So, what did you do?" I asked.

"I sat. I sat and bled and ached, and I accepted what it was. By now, I was at least a few states away

from home, and for me to try and make the trip, I'd die along the way. So, I decided to save myself the hassle and just die there. I was young. Just a few weeks fresh of my twentieth birthday. It had been almost two years since I left home. One living in the human town, one living in the woods. I decided that it couldn't get better than this, and every time I moved, another rogue was there to hurt me. So, I gave up, much like you did, Melissa."

I gulped at the evident pain in Maxim and Lukas's faces. It must've been hard-knowing that there was a time when your mate gave up on life. At least for Felicity, it had been an entire year that she fought for her life. I simply floated down the river and starved.

"But then, like the angel that she is. . ." Felicity's voice trailed as she stared at Louie.

Ah. It made sense now. When she said that Louie saved her life, too, she actually did.

"Louisiana found me and cared for me just like Veronica did." She laughed a bit with a thoughtful expression. "It was as if every other species was darn to me. First human, now a dragon. For those who don't know, Louie is a natural healer. Dragons don't live in packs like we do, but there are families of them who might settle here or there. Louie was all alone, much like I was. So, I agreed to stay with her.

"Her plan was to help me find my mate's pack. That was the only way I would be truly saved. But we were cautious, and we knew it would be almost impossible to get past a werewolf border. So, we became bunk buddies."

The evident adoration in both their eyes was amazing.

"Louie taught me how to survive as a rogue and how to fight. We settle at different places for months, sometimes weeks, and sometimes days. If the weather doesn't drive us away, other rogues do. But it had become our lives. Louie wasn't alone, and I was finally surviving as a rogue. She taught me how to cook raw meat so I could actually let it stay down, and we lived. Of course, there were times when I got frustrated when she couldn't resist taking home injured rogues, even some that I recognised."

"I couldn't help it," Louie laughed.

"I know. That's what makes you amazing." Felicity smiled as she wiped her face clean from all tears. "Well, that's my story. I lived with Louie for the past four years until Melissa showed up at our doorstep, and here we are."

She ended with a sigh and an expectant look in our direction.

"Thank you for telling us, Felicity," I said. "And I think I talk for everyone when I say, I don't think you're selfish. I think you're strong, smart and wonderful, and I'm so glad that I'll finally be able to live with you."

Just as I suspected, everyone agreed.

"Louisiana," Lukas said, eyes sparkling in a newly earned respect. "You have not only saved Melissa's life, but Felicity's as well. And from what I've heard, hundreds of rogues too?"

"It's a weakness of a healer," Louie laughed nervously.

But Lukas shook his head. "Not a weakness. I didn't protest about you living here because Maxim and I know what you mean to our mates, and you have truly earned our trust and respect. But I don't want to hinder you from performing your gift. So please, as you wish, you can share our kindness with anyone in the pack. You can even work alongside the pack doctors. Well, once we've introduced you and Felicity to the pack, of course."

Louie's face brightened. "Really?"

"Of course. Maxim? Any objections?"

Maxim seemed surprised, as if he didn't expect Lukas to ask him such an obvious question.

"Uh-no. Of course not!"

"Well, it's settled then." Lukas smiled as he shook her hand once before turning to his mate. "And you . . ." His voice fell husky and soft. "My strong, wonderful mate, we'll talk about your induction later. But perhaps we should talk more alone."

She nodded in agreement. I guess it was fair. I mean, coming back from the dead couldn't be easy. There was a lot Lukas had to do before he had this induction."

But it was then that I noticed that something was set in motion. This was the time in their lives that they would look back at how they used to live and laugh. The hard times were over. A new life was set in motion, and they were finally free.



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