

Going Down Fighting

For what she would find out later was a month, Charlotte was never given a reprieve from those vein-hourly injections, living in a constant state of agony and exhaustion. She had almost no memories of being lucid, and the only times she found the energy to move was when a tray of sludge and water was delivered into her cell or when she had to relieve herself. Erikson needn't have bothered threatening her because Charlotte could barely crawl across her cell, let alone make an escape attempt.

It was only with the arrival of the Luna that Erikson had wanted to get his hands on, that she left her cell again. This time she was dragged out of it by the Alpha. Charlotte's legs felt useless as she tried to keep up with his big steps, trying to keep her legs from being dragged behind her as Erikson pulled her up the stairs and down several hallways. He had taken her shortly before her next injection was due, but weeks of not being able to walk around had resulted in her losing almost all of her muscle mass.

A glance at the wrist the Alpha had a hold of told Charlotte how much weight she had lost — she had always been petite and skinny, but now she looked almost skeletal. For the first time in her life she hadn't kept up with her training and she felt weak. She would be absolutely useless in a fight.

They passed a group of guards who watched on curiously as their Alpha dragged a dirty, scrawny girl behind him. Charlotte could have sworn she had seen a glimmer of pity in one of the man's eyes, but she knew better than to hope he might help her. She had learned quickly in the Portland pack house that hope was useless.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked the Alpha, sounding drunk as the words slid off her tongue clumsily. They were the first words she had spoken since he had left her in a cell with a dead body haunting the dark space, so they were as rough as they were slurred.

"Your brother was meant to bring Lily to me," Erikson spat as he wrenched her forward by her wrist.

Charlotte could only assume he was talking about the Luna. "I'm guessing he didn't do it," Charlotte replied in a whisper, a growing sense of dread causing a sinking feeling in her stomach.

"Oh she's here, but he went and f****d up my whole plan," the Alpha yelled as he pulled her roughly into an elevator— she hadn't even come close to comprehending how big the place was if they needed an elevator to get around. "Lawson warned him what would happen if he messed up," the Alpha muttered as if speaking to himself. "But don't worry," he said with a dark chuckle, aiming his words at a confused Charlotte, "I won't kill you today. That can wait until tomorrow when he's here to witness it."

The careless words he threw at her stabbed into her with icy precision. He was going to kill her. Greg hadn't done what he wanted and Charlotte was going to pay the price for it. Fear for her life and grief and denial at her brother's betrayal cut into her, but she pushed and shoved those feelings aside to focus on her surroundings.

Charlotte was many things, an optimist being one of them— though being in that cell may have chipped away at her idealism somewhat— so when the elevator doors opened and Erikson dragged her behind him, her eyes ickered around, looking for a weapon. She was going to die unless she found a way to fight him and escape, and she wouldn't let herself go down without a fight. That wasn't who she was.

Her dark brown eyes caught on a fire extinguisher ahead on the bare white walls of the quiet and eerily empty hallway they were walking through. The red metal was hard to miss in the sparse space. Still, she wouldn't be able to reach for it while the Alpha had a grip on her, so she sent up a prayer to whoever might be listening and once they were two or three feet from the extinguisher, Charlotte made her move.

She felt the same way she did when her blood sugar dropped too low— sweaty, shaky, and weak— but adrenaline allowed her to keep going. She had sped up her steps so that she was right next to Erikson, putting her in the right position to stick her foot out and trip him as he rushed forward— it was juvenile, but it worked. The Alpha instinctively released Charlotte as his arms swung wildly and he stumbled forward, falling to his knees.

She only allowed herself a second to take in the beautiful sight before she was wrenching the fire extinguisher from the mounting bracket attached to the wall. It was dusty and probably too old to be of use during a fire, but that's not what Charlotte needed it for— she just needed something heavy to hit Erikson with.

And it really was heavy, she discovered as she staggered the three steps towards Erikson. He was swearing colorfully but had yet to get to his feet, giving Charlotte the perfect opportunity to swing the extinguisher at the back of his head. It slipped from her grip as it bashed into the back of the Alpha's head with a satisfying thunk, and as much as she wanted to pick it up so that she had a weapon, Charlotte knew that it would only slow her down.

Instead, she made a run for it back to the elevator they had come out of. Erikson groaned in pain behind her, and when she looked over her shoulder, he was slowly getting to his feet. Seconds later she was in the elevator and pressing the button with the number one on it. As elevators tend to do in those kinds of situations though, the doors took what seemed minutes to start closing.

For a few wonderful and blissful seconds Charlotte watched as the gap between the doors got smaller, and she truly believed that she might have gotten away. But right at the last second, a hand appeared between them, causing them to open back up and revealing an enraged Alpha Erikson.

"The guards warned me you were a sneaky b****h, but I thought they were just exaggerating," he said through clenched teeth.

Charlotte had the sudden thought that he looked like a raging bull with his arched nostrils and lowered eyebrows. It could have been an amusing comparison if she weren't the red cloth that said bull was after.

"We can do this the hard way or the easy way," Erikson explained to her as he stepped into the confined space, forcing her to back up into the corner.

He grabbed Charlotte's chin and forced her to look up at him. He stood almost two heads taller than her and her neck tingled painfully at the angle.

"But if you choose the hard way, your moron of a brother will pay the consequences," the Alpha threatened, his eyes promising Greg a world of pain if she chose that option.

"How do I know you won't hurt him anyway?" Charlotte asked, knowing better than to trust him. A bead of sweat dripped down the side of her face and she felt minutes from passing out from hunger and exhaustion.

Erikson sighed impatiently at her question. "You don't, but I guarantee that I'll do my best to torture the life out of him if you don't step out into the f****g hallway and stop fighting." His words started off softly, but by the last one, he was practically screaming, making Charlotte inch.

Charlotte considered his words for barely a second before making a decision. She wanted to scream in frustration, but instead, she nodded reluctantly, hating that he had found her one weakness— her brother was the only family she had left.

"Good girl," Erikson replied condescendingly, releasing her jaw only to grab her wrist again.

He led her down the hall and Charlotte followed along obediently, feeling like a dog on a leash with no option but to resign to its fate. The stark white-walled room that the Alpha took her to was only a few meters from the elevator, mere feet from where Charlotte had hit him with the extinguisher.

"Lily, this is Charlotte, Greg's sister," Erikson explained, pushing her forward.

A girl around the same age as her was restrained on a hospital bed, and she was looking at Charlotte with wide and confused green eyes. Charlotte knew that she must be the Luna from Seattle— Greg's Luna— but what she didn't expect was to see someone she recognized. Someone that she had never expected would become a Luna.

Lily had been a year below her in their high school in Hood River. Her father had been the Alpha of the Hood River pack, but Lily had been bullied mercilessly by almost everyone in the place on his orders. Charlotte had never understood why he had hated his daughter so much, but Greg had warned her from a young age to stay clear of Lily or risk angering Alpha Mason— a man similar to Alpha Erikson, she realized.

"I was planning on letting her go," Erikson continued, intruding on Charlotte's thoughts as he spoke to Lily, "But since her brother seems to have given everything away, I think I'll use her to teach you that little lesson."

Charlotte had no idea what lesson he was talking about, but her thoughts were too focused on her brother to care. Much as she hated it, a tear tracked down her cheek at the reminder of her brother's role in all of this. She didn't blame Greg for her being kidnapped and used as a bargaining chip, but if what Erikson had said was true, and he really had put her life in danger by not complying with the demands. She had never thought Greg would put her in harm's way, but he might have done just that. She wanted to deny it, but if Erikson was lying about it, he was putting on one hell of a performance.

"No! Wait," Lily shouted as the Alpha stepped towards a despondent Charlotte. "Greg wasn't the one who told me," she said, sounding desperate.

"Nice try," Erikson sneered, moving forwards and keeping his eyes fixed on Charlotte, "But I just don't believe you."

"I swear! It wasn't him," Lily screamed as he cornered the woman against the wall.

"This is what happens when people don't do what I ask," Erikson seethed as he grabbed a strand of Charlotte's short hair. "When people like your brother mess up my plans," he added, bringing his face so close to hers that she could feel his breath on her nose and lips.

"Please," Charlotte pleaded, trying to wriggle out of his grip.

Charlotte could hear Lily shouting pleas as the Alpha used his grip on her hair to bash the back of her head into the wall. She deliriously wondered if this was payback for hitting him in the back of the head with the extinguisher. It was on the fourth blow to her skull that Charlotte began screaming in pain and on the tenth that her screams became choked sobs. Soon she could feel the liquid warmth of blood trickling down her neck.

It was only after he had smashed her head back into the wall sixteen times that Erikson released her and allowed her to fall to the cold and hard floor. Black dots danced across Charlotte's vision and the words that Erikson said next seemed muffled and far away. She wanted to throw up, or just pass out, or something. Anything but continue to feel the pain in her skull.

"Do you see what happens when someone doesn't follow my orders?" he asked as he stomped down on Charlotte's elbow.

She heard the c****k of her bone breaking before her body registered the kind of excruciating pain that Charlotte could have never imagined. She didn't know if he was asking her or Lily, but she wouldn't have been able to respond either way— the only sound that managed to escape her was a moan. Her eyes met Lily's, but she found no comfort or relief from the pain in their green depths. She just wanted it to stop.

"Yes," Lily cried out, answering the Alpha's question.

"Do you see what happens to people who aren't on my side?" he asked, stepping on and wrenching Charlotte's other elbow.

She could feel the bile rising in her throat, and when the darkness came to consume her this time, she didn't fight it. She embraced it with open arms, sinking into its depths with the sounds of Lily and Erikson sending her off.

"Yes," Lily sobbed.

"So, will you listen to me with a bit more understanding now?" Erikson snapped, and another jolt of pain went through Charlotte's elbow as if he had stomped on it again.

Those were the last things she heard and felt before the world around her faded away.