

Chapter 13 – The Garnet

Moon Pack

"No one knows for certain how much impact they have on the lives of other people. Oftentimes, we have no clue. Yet we push it just the same." - Jay Asher, Thirteen Reasons Why

Lyra

I've never expected that I would cut a road trip getaway with my husband short when encountering a broken pup.

I spare glances at Halima from the rear-view mirror, curled tightly in my denim jacket. It did nothing to cover the bruises and cuts that littered her legs, starkly standing out from her brown skin. Many of her bruises look months old, never having the chance to heal properly. Her curly hair littered and matted with dirt, leaves and other scum lay stiffly on her head. I faintly spot an open wound on the back of her head, barely obscured by her hair. My heart breaks the more I look at her, vulnerable and broken to the world. What evil people could stomach hurting

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this poor girl? I don't know if it's my motherly instinct, but I felt an overwhelming sense to protect this girl. The terrified look in her brown eyes when I first met her back on the road reminds me of the battered women and children Nikolai and I welcome into our pack for safety.

They all have that same look in their eyes, fear, hopelessness, and torment.

“Honey.” My husband's sweet voice drew me out of my thoughts. His deep amber, almost golden eyes held mine through the mirror. “We should take Halima to Dr. Nava for examination. It would tell us a better story of what she went through. Something tells me a female doctor is better suited for this.”

Teresa Nava was one of our best pack doctors. Passionate, informative, and open, she oozes warmth and security. Many of our wolves who seek her treatment come out with smiles on their faces. She helped deliver many pups alongside her husband and mate, Diego Nava. They work harmoniously inside our medical office, providing optimal care to the entire pack.

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“I agree.” I sigh. “What pack do you think she came from?”

“It’s hard to tell.” Nikolai huffed. “She holds a rogue scent, and we found her far from any known pack territory. But her rogue scent is fresh, which means it hasn’t been long since she went rogue. Judging by her bruises and how skinny she is, she didn’t have much of a choice.”

That made sense. Many have gone rogue for years to a few months, to a few days and it’s all based on how fresh the scent was. Recent rogues have a fresh, potent scent. Long-time rogues’ scent was just as potent, but it’s not fresh at all. The car continues to speed down the open road, bumping into a few potholes along the way. I glance back at Halima to see she was still asleep.

“There is something special about her,” I say with a smile. “Can you sense it? Something deep. Very few wolves have this unique aura around them.”

“I can.” My husband nodded. “As if she’s blessed with an extraordinary gift. When she is up to talking, she could tell us more about where she

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came from.”

“She needs to feel safe, first,” I added. “I don’t think Halima has felt safe in a long time.” I ponder in thought for a moment. “She looks like she’s about Lyria’s age, or younger. Probably younger.”

“Goddess, that would mean she is barely eighteen.” He growled, gripping the steering wheel tight to where his knuckles flashed white. “She’s a baby! Once I find the pack that did this to her—!”

“My love.” I rest my palm on his large hand. Instantly, my touch calmed Nikolai down. That’s one benefit of having a mate bond, you could feel what they feel and calm them down when needed. “Let’s take care of Halima first. Then we can figure out what to do from there.”

An hour and a half passes, and we reach the stone gates of the Garnet Moon Pack. My husband signals for the guards to let us in. We drive slowly through the snake-like path of

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redwood trees, their scent bringing me internal pleasantries. As we drew closer to the pack grounds, the faint sounds of soldiers' training and children's laughter mingled in the air.

The Garnet Moon Pack was known as the Warrior Pack of California. We cultivate our members to be strong and skillful warriors both as humans and as wolves. We specialize in strength training, weapon training, and hand-to-hand combat. I was proud to say that our wolves were near unbeatable. We train to protect, fight, and serve. We occasionally send our warriors to neighboring packs if they need help. Any wolf seeking protection knows that the safest place for them to be was Garnet Moon, hence why we have many children and adults escaping and healing from abuse from their families or mates.

I always thought wolves were better than humans, but we were more alike than we seem, unfortunately.

We reached the garage, the car coming to a full stop. Leaning over, I gently tap Halima on the knee to wake her up. She wakes up in a startled scream, her eyes registering fear and confusion.


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It's only after a minute does she realize where she is, or rather, who she was looking at.

"W-where am I?" She asks me in a frightened whisper.

"You are now on the territory of the Garnet Moon Pack, the pack of warriors," Nikolai answered, unbuckling his seatbelt. Halima's eyes widened at the explanation, her mind working.

"I've never heard of Garnet Moon before." She admits, gripping my denim jacket for dear life. She took a deep whiff of it, my scent helping to calm her down. I couldn't help but smile fondly. It brought me joy. The sounds from the lawn captured her attention, looking out the rear window. "Are your wolves...nice?"

"Most are. Some are hardheaded, like my son Anthony. Lord knows how he'll be once he is Alpha." I chuckled. "Halima, we're going to take you to the pack doctor to get you checked out. We want to know how healthy you are and the extent of your injuries." 

Halima shook in her seat, eyes cast down to her

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lap, the fear potent in her scent. “D-do I have to?”

My heart broke further. “Yes. I don’t want to push you into doing something you’re not ready for, but I highly recommend it. What do you say?” Halima went silent for a moment; Nikolai and I awaited her answer. After a minute, she looked up and nodded.

“Okay.”

Smiling, I exited from the car and went over to her side. Opening her car door, I offered her a hand, which she took with some hesitation. Exiting the garage, my husband and I passed through the warrior training grounds to the pack hospital. Some warriors stopped to spare a glance at the newcomer, no doubt detecting her rogue scent. That only made Halima nervous, clear on how close she was pressing against me and hiding her face in my arm. Our Deltas reprimanded the soldiers to continue training, instantly putting their attention back into sword fighting.

“It’s okay,” I whispered to the trembling girl.

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“They must wonder what a rogue is doing on their territory. It has been a while since we had one walk on our grounds alone.”

“I’m sorry...”

“Don’t be. You did nothing wrong, baby girl.”

It wasn’t long until the three of us reached the pack hospital. I notice some hospital beds were taken up by warrior wolves, some wolves with their mates at their side, and the elderly. In the pediatric unit, we had some children healing from injuries they sustained during their training, or if they recently came from an abusive home.

I spot a woman in her white coat with a stethoscope hanging around her neck, giving her clipboard to our charge nurse. Ebony hair tied high in a ponytail and thick-rimmed glasses resting on her nose, her blue eyes sparkled once we’re spotted. “My Alpha. My Luna. What brings you by?”

“No need for formalities, Teresa.” I smiled, placing a hand on Halima’s back. “Halima, this is

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Dr. Nava, one of our most trusted physicians. She won't hurt you. I promise." I took a moment to realize just how short Halima is. Werewolves, on average, were taller than five feet nine inches, but Halima stands about five feet five inches. She was short by werewolf standards.

"Halima?" Dr. Nava bent down to Halima's height. "Luna Lyra is right. I'm here to help you. I want to examine you so we could get a sense of your state of health." She held out a hand. "Will you come with me?"

Halima flinched, taking precarious steps away from her. She stared at Dr. Nava's outstretched palm for a moment before looking up at me. "Could you stay with me, please? I don't want to go in alone."

"But you won't be alone, Halima."

"I'd feel safer if you were with me." Her bony hands clenched mine tight. "P-Please?"

My heart swelled at the thought of Halima already trusting me. The look in her eyes was pitiful, exposed. I sigh, looking at my husband

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who knows what I was about to do.

“I have some business to take care of regarding a couple of our alliances.” Nikolai kissed me on my forehead, tapping my nose affectionately with a finger. “Link me if you need anything, my love.”

“Of course.” I pushed up on the tips of my toes and gave a small kiss to my husband on the lips before he departed to the packhouse. Looking back down at Halima, I smiled. “Let us go in, baby girl.” And with that, Dr. Nava took us into an examination room.

I don't know how many times a heart could break in one sitting, but I think I've just underestimated just how much my heart could take. The examination took about an hour and a half. But with each discovery, I grew sadder and angrier. Halima had gone through hell and back, and dare I say, she was the worst case of abuse and neglect I've ever seen.

The number of tears Halima shed during the examination was endless. When she got dressed

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in a hospital gown and looked at herself in the mirror for the first time, she fell to her knees and sobbed. As if this was the first time she looked at her reflection in the mirror after so long and hated what she was seeing. She had to be weighed, but I didn't need a number to tell me just how malnourished and underweight she was since anyone could see her bones.

Taking her vitals was the hardest part. The needle terrified her. Finding a vein was easy, but calming her shakes was hard. Many times, I had to hold her hand to let her know that she was safe. She kept my denim jacket with her, taking a whiff whenever she felt nervous. Dr. Nava and Nurse Mei helped to bandage her head wound and cleaned up any other wounds left to fester.

But what shocked me the most were the marks she bore on her back. The Mark of the Betrayer. I've only seen a handful of wolves with that mark back in my old pack, Diamond Moon. It's reserved for the vilest and heinous of all wolves. But why does Halima have it? Why did her old Alpha give her the mark? Halima fell into uncontrollable sobs and shakes when the mark was examined on her back. And not even my

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scent could help calm her down. Her shakes worsened when the nurses attempted a pelvic exam. The screaming was horrid. She grew so erratic and fearful that Dr. Nava made the painful decision to sedate Halima, especially since she made threats of suicide.

Now, she was asleep. Nurse Mei stitched up the Mark of the Betrayer on her back. According to historical texts, the mark would never heal, it's allowed to fester and weaken the wolf. But somehow, Halima defied the odds with it. Stitches helped, but it had already begun to heal. Unfortunately, her right shoulder blade would never have the same patch of skin again. It would be a healed scar, standing out from her dark skin.

With the IVs in her arms and hands, fluid flowing through the tubes steadily, she looks so peaceful, like an angel. I already mind-linked Lead Omega Cleo to organize a room for her. As I watch Halima's chest rise and fall, Dr. Nava comes in with a clipboard in hand and concern on her face.

“Luna Lyra, may I talk to you in private, please?”

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Noting the urgency in her voice, I pat Halima's hand once before heading outside to the hallway.
I'll be back Halima. Just keep resting.

"What's the matter?"

"Walk with me."

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
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