

Chapter 14 – The Trauma

“We don’t even ask happiness, just a little less pain.” — Charles Bukowski

Lyra

We walked down the sleek hospital hallways together, side by side. “Halima’s chart is genuinely concerning. She must stay in the hospital for at least two days for observation. She had many bone fractures in the past, her ex-rays show many areas had to heal numerous times, but because she was not having enough calcium in her diet, her bone mass had lowered, and it left way for breakage to show.” Dr. Nava paused for a moment before continuing.

“She’s severely malnourished and underweight to where it’s a significant danger to her health. Since she’s a werewolf, it’s too dangerous for her to shift in this state, as it might kill her. Her vitals were also alarming. Her potassium levels are extremely low, but her blood pressure and blood sugar levels are high. She also has abnormal hormonal levels. I don’t think Halima has begun her menstrual cycle. Normally, I’d see these types of health concerns in human anorexia patients, but this girl was deliberately deprived of food and water over an extended period. Whatever pack she came from, they put her through literal hell.”

“Oh, *Dios mio*,” I mutter, rubbing my temples in frustration. Halima was and still is right at Death’s door, and her old pack put her there. I never wanted to tear apart a pack more than whichever she came from. “What could we do to help her?”

“Well, we need to consult with one of our nutritionists to get her on a nutrition and weight restoration plan.” Dr. Nava explained. “The human

body is adaptable, a werewolf's body, even more so. Her body had learned to adapt to little nutrition, and we need to change that. Her wounds would need to heal, and we need to help to bring her body systems back to optimal levels. That's what we could do for her physical health. As for psychologically..."

My eyes fluttered shut, already knowing what Teresa was about to say. Physical health could heal with proper care and rest. Emotional and mental health, however...that's an entirely different challenge to conquer. Given how erratic Halima became not too long ago, she'll need all the help she could get.

I know the therapist that might help Halima.

"LYRA!"

I jerk my head at the sudden scream of my name. It was blood-curling. It came from Halima! Bolting back into her hospital room. I could see the girl looking around frantically for me. Instantly I was at her side, placing her hands in my own. The glossy look in her eyes faded, spilling tears down her cheeks. Her frantic breathing slowed, and her palpitating heart calmed. "I'm here, Halima. I'm so sorry, I had to speak with your doctor."

Halima nodded in silence, eyes on her lap once again. Dr. Nava came back in to check on both the IV bags and the girl, jotting notes in her clipboard. "Halima, how are you feeling?" She asked.

"Um... exhausted," Halima answered shyly, sniffing. "Weak. Very weak."

Teresa grabbed a seat and sat on the other side of Halima's bed, resting the clipboard on her lap. She gently cradled Halima's other hand in her own. "Halima, I'm going to ask you some questions, and I want you to answer them as honestly as you can. Can you do that for me?"

Hesitant, Halima nodded.

“Okay, that’s good,” The good doctor offered a small smile. “How old are you?”

“...Seventeen.”

“When was the last time you had a decent meal? Try your best to pinpoint a specific time in your life.”

Halima went silent, ruminating. “I was nine. After that, they fed me less and less until it became nothing. Even if I did eat, I can’t hold much food down without vomiting. It’s too hard.”

I closed my eyes, yet again, appalled at the treatment she went through. Halima hasn’t had a decent meal in eight years. That was the answer Dr. Nava was looking for.

“Okay.” She nodded. “I will speak with one of our dietitians about our next course of action. I’ll leave you two alone.”

Once Dr. Nava left the room, a comfortable silence befell the both of us. It’s a shame that I must break it. “Halima... I know this is all extremely hard for you. But I need you to answer a few more questions for me, okay? If there are questions you don’t want to answer, just shake your head, okay?”

She gave me a slight nod, telling me she was nervous but willing to answer.

“Could you tell me a bit about where you came from?”

<i>Halima</i>	
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I almost didn't want to answer. Talking about my past was hard, and the memories hurt every time they rear their ugly head in my mind. I look closer at Luna Lyra, taking in all her gentle features, her downward-turned lips stretching with an accompanying smile. Luna Lyra was beautiful, and her peachy scent helps me to trust her. I look into her eyes to see that she wanted to help me and cares about me.

Why couldn't my mother be like this?

My breath came out in shakes, bracing my mind for the onslaught of terrible memories. Artemis was here, with me, providing me with her warmth and comfort. It was hard for her too, seeing all the pain and abuse I've gone through. Without her, I don't know where I'd be. With the combined warmth of Luna Lyra and my wolf, I opened my mouth and began talking.

"My old pack is Zircon Moon."

"The pack in Nevada? The pack that lost their Luna and her daughter to rogues?"

I nodded. "Yes, that one. The Alpha at that time blamed me for their deaths because I was there when it happened. His daughter and I were best friends, and we went into the woods despite us being told not to. She and the Luna died moments later to the rogues. He threw me in prison because of my part in their deaths. They turned me into the pack slave when I was fourteen after I tried to run away the first time. That's also when they stopped giving me food scraps to eat."

"Oh, *bebida*," Lyra whispered, squeezing my hand. "That's where all these bruises and cuts came from."

I nodded. "They never stopped hurting me. They said I deserve to suffer, that I should have died and not Luna Celeste and Nuria. I can't remember the last time any of them were kind to me."

“Did anyone help you?” She asked, almost afraid of what I would say next.

“Very few.” I gave her a tiny smile. “The Gammas of my pack would sometimes sneak me food like soup or bring me soap when I’ve run out for my showers. They also helped me escape from the pack for good.” My eyes watered at the thought of Kwame and his family. How were they doing? Were they being punished for helping me escape? I silently prayed for the Moon Goddess to protect them.

“They sound like the good people in a sea full of monsters,” Lyra replied thoughtfully. “Why do you not have a pack mark?”

I released a shaky sigh, the memories of the cliff coming back. “I’ve renounced Zircon Moon. I said the special incantation and broke my bond. After that I…” I clamped shut, not ready to talk about the drastic decision of jumping off that cliff.

Lyra placed a comforting hand on my back. “You don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to. I’m more than happy that you’re answering me. It gives me more of a better understanding of your origins.”

“I was rejected.” I blurted out. The Luna seemed taken aback at my sudden revelation, a horrified expression on her face. “H-He’s the one who gave me the mark on my back…” I held up a hand to the back of my head, the wound now covered in thick gauze. “And this too.” Nurse Mei, who was nice, had to help me wash my hair so that the wound doesn’t get infected by my curly hair. My scalp doesn’t feel clean considering the curls were still very matted. When I saw the amount of dirt in the sink from my hair, I broke down.

“Your mate is the Alpha?” Lyra asked, mouth agape.

“Was.” I corrected. “He rejected me during his Passage of the Alpha ceremony. He wanted someone else, and he still views me as the girl who let his mother and sister die. Accepting me was not an option for

him.” I sighed heavily, now glancing up at the tiled ceiling. “I accepted his rejection, anyway. What’s done is done.”

Lyra stood up, leaned over, and embraced me in a hug. I froze for a minute. The last time I had a decent hug was from Selene, but this...this felt different. This was a tangible hug, coming from a mother with a heart too big for this world. Her scent brought tears to my eyes again, but this time in appreciation. I sniffled heavily and cried in Lyra’s arms for a good while, releasing all the tension I had since I came back to earth. She rubbed my back, whispering words in Spanish in my ear, soothing me back to serenity.

This felt good. I didn’t want it to end.

But it did. After a while, Lyra sat back down, wiping the tears that fell on her face. Did she cry for me?

Why couldn’t I be her child? Why couldn’t Lyra be my mother? She treated me better than my biological mother.

“You deserve better than them.” She confessed, bringing a hand to my cheek. I nuzzled in her palm, growling softly at her touch. “You’re not going back there. Ever.”

I sighed with content. Her resolve was so powerful, and it made me feel safe. I didn’t want to leave.

“Halima, Dr. Nava says that you need to stay here for a few days for observation. What that means is that they want to monitor your health for any changes before you are to be discharged. They want to make sure you’re healthy enough before your release.”

That made sense, I think. I felt like I could fall over and die at any moment, but I was also sure Selene was making sure I didn’t. “I can’t shift into my wolf. She says it’s too dangerous.”

“You have a very smart wolf because Teresa said the same thing.” She chuckled, taking my hand into hers once more. “What’s your wolf’s name?”

“Artemis,” I replied with a grin. “She’s always been there for me and is the only person, well, animal that I can trust wholeheartedly.”

“I’m glad. Our wolves are the best confidants. One day, I hope Isabella, my wolf, and I can meet her. If I may ask, what color is she?”

“White.” Lyra stares at me, mouth agape once again. I waved a hand in front of her face. “Lyra? Did I say something wrong?”

“N-No, dear.” She shook her head. “I was just thinking. But anyway, I have something else I want to ask of you.”

“Okay.”

“Would you like to stay here in Garnet Moon?” Her wide smile was hopeful, expecting a positive answer. “Our pack gives homes to children, men, and women who come from abusive homes and packs and offers them a safe place to stay. We’re also one of the best warrior packs in the world, so you’re protected. Since you are packless, I thought, maybe, you would like to stay here. Nikolai and I will offer you a room, a warm bed, and food to eat.”

She squeezed my hand. “Allow me to give you what Zircon Moon couldn’t, a safe home.”

I’m shocked. I was a rogue with the Mark of the Betrayer cut on my back, and she was offering me a place to stay in her home? It’s all so sudden, it’s more than what I deserve. The thought of finally having a warm, clean bed made my heartbeat with anticipation. Even this hospital bed was giving me more than what that musty mattress in my cell could ever provide.

It was an enticing offer.

But I was still scared. Scared that the wolves of this pack won't like me, and I'll be rejected all over again. What if I was treated as a slave again? What if I was treated badly? What if Garnet Moon turns into Zircon Moon 2.0? My heart couldn't take that betrayal again.

"Let's go for it." I hear Artemis say. **"We have every right to not trust the honeyed words of people we come across, but Lyra is genuine."** **
I reached out to Isabella, and she wants us to stay**. **She wants us to feel safe. This could be the better life Selene hinted, you know? Besides, we deserve a soft bed."**

As I've said before, I trust Artemis' judgment more than anything else. I want to experience what it's like to have a warm and safe home, a place I could call my own and be proud of it. Lyra and Nikolai have given me more than what I could repay them for. Perhaps, it wouldn't be so bad.

Giving a soft smile, I took Lyra's hands into my own and squeezed. My eyes filled with appreciation, and the happiness I thought I lost long ago. With a confident voice, I answered Garnet Moon's Luna.

"Yes, I would love to stay here in Garnet Moon."