


## Chapter 16 – The Grief

*"Each of us has his own rhythm of suffering." —*  
*Roland Barthes* 

Lyra came over and gently lifted my chin. Her fingers grazed at my feeding tube as gentle as a feather, face contorting into one of pain. "Did this hurt?"

I nodded. "Yeah. But, after a while, it isn't so bad. Dr. Nava says I might have this in me for a while since I can't eat."

"That must suck." Jackie cringed, her hand on her forehead in her dramatics. "If I couldn't have my supply of Lead Omega Cleo's special buffalo wings, I'd wither away to nothing!"

"Didn't you just have a plate full of wings last night?"

"Yes. It's been forever!" She groaned.

Lyra chuckled to herself. "I can't wait for you to find your mate. Having one might humble you."

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"Well, wherever she is, she'll just have to deal with the fact that I'm a dramatic bit—err, gal." I tick my head to the side, my eyes questioning her. "I'm a lesbian."

"Ah."

"If there was anyone you would want to have at your side, it's Jacqueline," Lyra explained to me. It fed Jackie's ego because her smile grew wider if that was even possible. "In fact, once you're well enough, she'll give you a tour of our land."

"Please. You won't admit that I'm the best tour guide ever. The kids love me!"

"Most of them do, anyway." Lyra took my hands into hers. "Besides our resident energetic wolf—"

"I prefer, '*resident weirdo*.'"

Lyra rolled her eyes playfully. "How are you feeling?"

"Okay, with all things considering." Her face fell into sadness. "I mean, Nurse Mei, fed this morning, and it's not so bad. At least the liquid

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food and water stayed in my stomach this time. But I'm still in pain." My hand reached to the back of my head where my wound was. Pain pulsed like a dull throb, the lesion ever so present. I then turned to Jackie with a gentle smile, exposing my teeth. "My name is Halima. It is nice to meet you."

"Finally, I can put a lovely name to a lovely face. It's nice to meet you too!" Jacqueline leaned in to hug me, but I cringed and jumped away from her, shuffling to the end of my bed.

"Sorry. I-I don't want to be touched, yet. You did nothing wrong... I promise."

Jackie blinked in understanding, her smile reassuring. "I apologize for being too forward. I want you to be comfortable, so let me know if I'm pushing your boundaries."

I half expected her to be offended, but she took what I said with grace. It's true, I didn't want to be touched by anyone. Lyra made me feel safe and secure, which was why I didn't flinch away from her touches. Jackie had an overall amazing vibe and vibrant personality, but I still don't

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trust anyone else yet.

But I hope there would come a time where I trust her. Jackie had shown me more kindness and excitement in five minutes than anyone else has in years. My hand unconsciously went to my hair again and I cringed at the heavy matting I feel under my fingers. Jackie stood up and leaned over to look at my hair, cautious to not touch me.

“Do you want me to help with that?”

“Huh? You want to help?”

“Yes!” Jackie danced in her seat with radiant happiness. “Our hair is our crown, and we must treat it like royalty. Judging by your curls, they are a little looser than my tight ones. Type 4A hair from the looks of it. My mom, the Beta Female, could help too. She knows all about hair, and I have a couple of products from our store that could get rid of the matting and tangles.”

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I looked at Lyra for reassurance. The woman smiled, squeezing my shoulder to offer support. “Violet is very knowledgeable about hair and



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skillful with her hands.”

“Dad sure knows all about that.” Jacqueline bounced her eyebrows mischievously and cackled, only to earn a smack on the back of the head from her Luna.

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It didn't take long for Violet Seals, the Beta Female, to come in with a bag full of sweet-smelling products and combs. Every product had scents ranging from tropical fruit to cherry candy. I had no one to touch my hair besides Nurse Mei, so I was incredibly nervous. But both Violet and Jacqueline made my experience comforting without effort. Detangling my hair was a challenging feat because my hair hadn't had a decent wash in years. They lathered my hair with oils and creams and combed through all the loose and tight tangles, careful to not yank my hair. Their hands were gentle against my scalp, taking great care to not irritate the wound on my head, especially since it was still raw. Detangling the hair around there was painful.

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I relaxed as their magic fingers took great care of me. There was a growing pile of hair next to my legs of shedded and damaged hair that had fallen out because of past roughness, but I didn't mind. Each strand of hair that was pulled out of my tangles took away some burden it experienced from violent hands.

"Your curls are beautiful, baby girl," Violet spoke in awe, massaging circles into my scalp. "Your hair is a little lopsided, weirdly cut. What happened?"

"My old pack liked to hack at my hair whenever they felt like it," I explained in a shy whisper, memories of Raina, Odessa, and their friends running at me with sharp scissors attacking the forefront of my mind.

"Why didn't your Mom stop them?" Jackie asked.

I grow silent, reluctant to talk about the woman who abandoned me. I looked at my lap, allowing the mother-daughter duo to continue working on my hair in my silence. Jackie whispered an apology in my ear before resuming her detangling.

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I couldn't help but be jealous. Violet and Jackie have a close relationship, working together harmoniously to comb out the kinks of this bird nest. The sensations awaken distant memories of when I was young, memories I thought were long forgotten. Memories of my mother and the love she gave me many years ago brought pain to my heart and chest. Deep underneath all the pain she caused; the memories of her loving touches did not fade. I still remember how tender she used to be, her sweet scent of jasmine and cherries, and her smiles full of love and care. I was her baby girl and I loved her. I really did.

Now, no longer. And yet, that hurt the most because I no longer held love for my mother. It withered and died years ago.

I didn't notice the tears falling down my face until I started convulsing in painful sobs. My hands covered my face as I cried out for my mother and for what my mother used to be. The inner child that I thought died came out at full force, screaming and wailing for her. She wept for her, my father, and my older sister. She wept for their love, their playfulness, and their protection.



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She wept for what my family used to be.

My parents were no longer the parents who had dedicated their lives to protect and love me. They no longer loved me, and they showed it every time they discarded me like trash. They tore my heart out and danced all over it. Raina was and always would be the most important person to them. They cultivated her to be the best Beta Female, while simultaneously tossing me into the hounds. They took the word of their tyrannical Alpha over their baby girl.

I cried and cried as the loving scent of peaches invaded my nose. I wrapped my arms around Lyra with all the strength I could muster, silently begging to know why my family turned their backs on me. Her hands rubbed smooth circles around my back, and soon, Violet and Jackie engulfed me in their arms. I was dead center in the middle of a group hug, fully aware that the entire hospital could hear my pain-laced cries.

It hurt to cry with the feeding tube down my throat. The hate for my family festered in my heart, fueled by my sadness and anger. They taught me one thing; blood was not thicker than



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water. <sup>1</sup>

Betrayal of blood hurts the most.

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“Are you okay, *Mija*?” Lyra asked me, sitting on the edge of my hospital bed with Dr. Nava. Violet and Jackie left a while ago after they successfully detangled and washed my hair. They braided my hair in two large cornrows that barely touched my shoulders. Nurse Mei redressed my head wound with clean gauze, discarding the bloody one into a hazardous waste bin. Dr. Nava was inserting my lunch down the feeding tube along with water through a series of medical syringes. My stomach rose at the food, now a tiny inflated balloon. It was a bit uncomfortable.

“I’m okay.” My throat and lungs still hurt from my unexpected crying fit. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know what came over me...”

“You have nothing to apologize for.” She hummed, rubbing my hand. Her warmth sunk into my palms like a gentle fire, filling my body with pleasant peace. “What happened to you is

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still very fresh on your mind, and you shouldn't apologize for releasing your emotions. It's normal, and it's healthy."

I sat in silence, embarrassed. I drew a lot of attention from the hospital staff and patients alike. I never enjoyed being the center of attention. Dr. Nava finished administering my food through the tube, cleaning her hands.

"Halima." Dr. Nava came back from the bathroom, taking a seat next to Lyra. "If all things go well, we should discharge you by tomorrow, the next day at the latest. However, I want to introduce you to your treatment team."

"Team?" I cocked my head to the side. "I have a team?"

"Yes." Dr. Nava nodded. "What we will set you on is a Weight Restoration Plan. We have two goals for you, to help you get back to eating on your own and to get you back to a healthy weight. You would have four people that will help you, a medical doctor, a nutritionist, a psychotherapist, and a psychiatrist."

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“That’s... a lot of people,” I whispered.

“It is, and it may seem overwhelming, but we are all here to help you.” Dr. Nava reassured me with a soft hand on my shoulder. “Your medical doctor will be me, of course. Your nutritionist would help you sort out meal plans and weight gain strategies. Your psychotherapist and psychiatrist will work together with you on how to cope with the trauma you’ve been through with coping strategies, therapy, and medications if it comes down to it. All three are outstanding people, and I’m proud to have them in our hospital. However, if you’re too tired, you could meet them tomorrow morning.”

It stunned me that I have my own treatment team. Dr. Nava’s eyes regarded me with a glimmer of hope that I’ll accept the help. My fingers pinched at the elastic skin on my wrists and sides once again, reminding me of why I shouldn’t be this skinny. I was unhealthy and I want to feel normal again. My life shouldn’t wither away like my weight. I never realized the extent of the physical and emotional damage until I came here.



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I want to be healthy. I want to feel genuine happiness. I want to shift again and be an actual werewolf. I want to take back what Zircon Moon stole from me—my life.

“But,” Dr. Nava spoke again. “You have to want to get better. A lot of effort would come from you and getting into a routine with meeting your treatment team. It’ll be a part of your life for as long as you stay on these lands.”

“I want to get better,” I spoke confidently. “I don’t want to be anymore, doctor.” 5

The doctor and Lyra shared a look of relief and confidence before looking back at me. “Very well, Halima. You’ll meet your team tomorrow morning. I will check your vitals again later tonight. You’ve improved slightly from yesterday, but we need to well enough so you could go into the packhouse. And I’m sure Luna Lyra, Alpha Nikolai, Jacqueline, and Beta Female Violet will all be there to support you.”

“Yes, we will,” Lyra replied with a contagious smile. “We all want you to get better, Halima. If you need anything, just say the word.”

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Infected by her grin, I smiled back. My first authentic smile since I've been here. Don't get me wrong, I feared the future and the upcoming challenges. But, the overwhelming amount of support I was getting from so many people here was giving me the confidence needed to move forward.

I must get better.

### Chapter Comments

POST COMMENT

Mary Fee

I don't want to  
be....-?-...anymore.



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Visitor

i love it! ❤️😍💕🤗😊



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