

Chapter 17 – The Move

"When you feel my heat, look into my eyes. It's where my demons hide, it's where my demons hide. Don't get too close, it's dark inside. It's where my demons hide, it's where my demons hide." - Demons, Imagine Dragons

Halima

Today was the day I was getting discharged from the hospital. I've grown comfortable in the two days I was here, but I knew the time would come where I must leave. I feel a little better, the IVs and the liquified food helped a lot. I expected a little more time for my vitals to balance out, but since I was a werewolf, they bounced back faster once I was provided with adequate fluids and nutrition. I'll be on a feeding tube for about a month and a half, or until I was strong enough to eat on my own, whichever comes first.

First thing this morning, Dr. Nava introduced me to my treatment team. I wanted to walk, so with her help, I met with the three people who will help me be as healthy as I can be.

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Dr. Alexandra Johnson was my nutritionist. She was one of the first humans I met in this pack, with her mate being a Delta. Her bright red hair caught my attention the most, paired with equally enticing green eyes and a face sprinkled with freckles. With a smile, she went over my proposed nutrition plan and taught me all about calorie intake, and how to reach my goal of gaining at least two pounds a week. I needed to have liquified meals for now, but from how she speaks about them, they shouldn't be so bad. I couldn't taste any of the liquid mixtures, so I didn't complain. She liked to crack jokes sometimes. Alexandra made me laugh several times, and I knew I'd do well with working with her.

Dr. Zimar Khan and Mayra Hernandez were my psychiatrist and psychotherapist, respectively. Both were werewolves. Dr. Khan hails from New Delhi, India with jet black wavy hair, golden eyes, and deep tan skin. Mayra was originally from Mexico City, Mexico, and once she graduated from college, she moved to Garnet Moon with her mate. She had caramel brown hair that's cut to a bob, deep brown eyes, and medium-dark skin. Both worked together to develop a mental

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health recovery plan for me.

Mayra oversaw my therapy sessions. Therapy was what I was not looking forward to. I would have to talk about my experiences with Zircon Moon and learn to open up, which was easier said than done. Mayra specializes in trauma-focused therapy, so it made sense why she was an excellent fit for someone like me. Dr. Khan helps with diagnosing and treatment. Both were very kind, with Zimar appearing more strictly professional while Mayra was more laid back.

I sat on the edge of my hospital bed, wondering what my life would be like here in Garnet Moon. My hands were folded on my lap and my eyes followed the tile creases of the pristine floors. I never imagined I'd have this much support from people I met less than three days ago. All my life I was left to do things on my own and the pack stripped any help from me. But here, people were more than willing to help a girl they barely knew. I have a treatment team, support from the Alpha and Luna, and a new friend? These things were originally unobtainable.

"How are you feeling, Hali?" Artemis asked me.
"

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I feel optimistic about our new lives here."

"I guess," I sighed. "It just all seems too good to be true, Art. I'm not used to any of this."

"Because we've been deprived of everything we're supposed to get while we were young," Artemis explained thoughtfully. **"We'll fit in here in no time. We just need to focus on our recovery."**

"Recovery..." That word was tossed around during my meetings with my treatment team, a word meaning to become healthy after a period of difficulty. A single word full of hope and optimism, yet I was having trouble grasping it. Doubt swims in my mind as I rest my head on my fist.

Could I really recover from what I've been through? I have eight years of damage to process abuse unimaginable from the people I once loved. Eight years' worth of repressed emotions that I was forbidden to express. I couldn't ever recover that time precious to me. What if I couldn't be fixed? What if this trauma stays with me forever?

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Will I ever be a normal, carefree werewolf? Could I complete the purpose that Selene had given to me? Would I ever be strong enough to fight the demons that plague my mind daily?

“Hello! Earth to Halima!” The chipper voice startled me back into reality. Jackie stood over me with a beaming grin and a large gym bag at hand. I didn’t notice her coming in. “What are you so deep in thought about?”

“N-Nothing,” I muttered, playing with my fingers.

“A simple tap on the shoulder would suffice, Jack.” A male voice argued. A man who looks exactly like Jackie but with shorter, side-shaved hair walks next to her. He was more muscular than Jackie but equal to her in height. His scent was like hers except for a slight aroma of sweet oranges. “My name is Dwayne, Halima. I’m Jackie’s older brother by two minutes.”

“Wow! So, y-you guys are—”

“Twins? Yep.” Dwayne smiled before shooting a wink. “But I’m the good twin.”

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“Good twin, my ass.” Jackie rolled her eyes.

“Everyone knows I’m the better twin and the better Beta.”

“Co-Beta.”

“Whatever!” Jackie pushed her brother to a chair before turning to me. “I bought some clothes for you to wear for your discharge. Luna Lyra said you only came in with only a dirty, mangled dress.”

“Yes, I did,” I confirmed. “Where is it, by the way?”

“It’s in a bag under your bed.” She quirked an eyebrow. “You want to keep that thing?”

Did I? It’s the only thing I own, and it’s a constant reminder of who I was. I want to get rid of it, but I want to do it in a meaningful way.

“Yeah, I do.”

“Suit yourself.” Jackie shrugged before slamming her bag next to me on the bed. Once she opened it, the scent of orange blossoms wafted out of the bag, filling the air like fresh perfume. She

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pulled out clothing of all sorts, mostly shirts, sweatpants, and some colorful hoodies. She also pulled out a pair of flip-flops and settled them next to my feet. "Pick whatever you want. I don't know what your style is, so I picked out the most comfortable clothes from my closet."

"They are also the clothes she wants to get rid of." Dwayne's amusement died when his sister threw one of her pants in his face.

I chuckle, looking over my options. All the clothes look soft and warm. They were also big enough to hide my bruises and skinny appearance. Speaking of, some of my bruises have healed, but there was still a dull, throbbing pain. After a minute, I went with a pair of grey sweats with a drawstring, a small blue shirt, and a dark purple zip-up hoodie. Shuffling out of my bed, I took my clothes to the bathroom and changed into them.

I looked at myself in the mirror after dressing in my chosen clothes. I look...different? I was so used to wearing a raggedy dress, so wearing clothes that cover my skin felt strange. The clothes bunched up around my ankles and wrists,

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but I like them. But, the best part about them was that they were soft and smelled just like Jackie. I emerged out of the bathroom, walking towards the black flip-flops.

“Thanks for the clothes again, Jackie.” I smiled at her. “They feel nice.”

“You can keep them, if you want.” She stuffed the other clothes back into the bag. “I have too many clothes, anyway. I was going to give them to some teenage pups around here, but I thought I’d let you have the first pick.”

“I appreciate it.”

“You have Beta blood, don’t you?” Dwayne pondered. “I could smell it on you.”

“What a way to not be a creep, bro.” Jackie rolled her eyes, catching the pants she threw at him with one hand. She stuffs the unpicked clothes back in her gym bag.

“I call it like it is! If something piques my interest, I’ll say something.”

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“Y-Yes.” I nodded, holding my elbows. “I have Beta blood.”

“I knew we were similar!” Jackie giggled. “I sensed it too when we first met, but I didn’t want to seem like a weirdo.”

“Says the resident weirdo.”

“Oh, shut up!” Jackie threatened, a low growl emitting from her throat. Their banter reminded me of the little banters Raina, and I would have when we were kids. It left a bittersweet taste in my mouth.

“Anyway...” Dwayne walked over, ignoring the burning glares from his twin sister. “Alpha Nikolai asked us to show you around the Garnet Moon territory after you’ve settled in your room. We thought we’d show you where it is.”

“Oh!” I felt a little disappointed that Luna Lyra wasn’t here, but that discomfort was quickly squashed by the twins smiling at me. I couldn’t help but smile back. I stuffed my hands in my pockets and nodded. “I’d like that. Thank you.”

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The twins helped sign my discharge papers since I was seventeen. Dwayne and Jackie were nineteen, two years older than me, so they took care of the miscellaneous details I couldn't understand. Dr. Nava gave me a bag full of supplies needed for my feeding tube, including syringes, medical tape, and extra tubes for replacements just in case. She also gave me a manilla folder filled with details of my nutrition plan, pamphlets, and other reading materials. Soon, the three of us left the pack hospital on our way to the packhouse.

The territory was enormous. Around me, I see wolves of all shapes, sizes, colors, and ages going about their merry ways. In the distance, the clanking and shrieking of metal and yells of protest and defense boomed through the air. The wolves were training hard with weapons while some were sparring in their wolf form. It reminded me of the training sessions back at Zircon minus the weaponry. My old pack relied mostly on the strength of wolves. Some wolves and she-wolves sat near the training grounds, goggling at the shirtless, sweaty men and women in deep concentration.

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On the other side, I see children training. I could tell all of them have already shifted, giving me relief that this pack doesn't train prepubescent children for battle. I notice compact houses and huts scattered around the territory with families mingling with one another as they relax in chairs outside. Smaller kids were kicking soccer balls around or chasing each other in a game of tag. In the far distance, I hear water splashing and cars rolling into the territory. It's a happy community, and it's much larger than Zircon.

"Amazing, isn't it?" Dwayne's voice draws me back to reality. "I bet Garnet Moon is nothing like your old pack, huh?"

"I agree," I muttered, my eyes still swishing around the territory. "How many wolves are there?"

"A little over five hundred," Jackie answered. "It takes a lot of money and resources to house and feeds these many wolves. Many of them were refugees from different packs, escaping dangerous situations. We also have a lot of humans here with their mates, a couple of witches who allied with us, and a crap ton of

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children. Overall, our members top 600, and everyone here has a unique role to accomplish. It could be something as small as care for the children to the Alpha in charge of an enormous community.”

“Is everyone treated equally?” I asked, earning strange looks from the twins. “Since you all have different species living here, I was just wondering...”

“Yes.” Dwayne nodded as we drew closer to the enormous packhouse. “Once you’ve bonded with Garnet Moon, we treat you like family. No matter if you’re a wolf, witch, or a human. We pride ourselves on equal opportunity. Some humans were Deltas, some witches help run our facilities and help care for the children and so much more. But it’s a lot to discuss in such a short amount of time.”

“And we’re here!” Jackie announced, gesturing to a building comparable to a mansion. Stone statues of howling wolves stood on either side of the entrance, howling to the sky. The exterior was decorated with windows, moss, and red stones embedded at the corners of the bricks.

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The mansion was about four stories high.

I wondered who all lives here.

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