

Chapter 20 – The Recovery

"You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore." - William Faulkner

Halima – Two Months Later

I stand on the mechanical medical scale in my patient room, watching the beam tilt and lean to get an exact measure of my weight. Dr. Nava slid the calibration bars from left to right until the beam stills. I weighed just above 120 pounds, which was one hell of an improvement from my ghastly 97 pounds two months earlier. I should celebrate, but I was not out of the woods yet. I was still slightly underweight by werewolf standards. However, Dr. Nava says that my physical recovery was going better than she had expected. Because of my werewolf DNA, I'll recover a lot faster than the average human.

A smile crept across my face; a sense of accomplishment rushed over me. I was thrilled with my weight gain; it meant I was getting better! When I look in the mirror nowadays, I was not as skinny as I used to be. The

Chapter 20 – The Recovery

indentations of my bones were disappearing, and I was gaining more body fat, which means I didn't have to wear hoodies or baggy clothes to keep me warm. That's tortuous considering we're in the middle of summer. The wound on the back of my head healed two weeks ago and Jackie had been helping me with my hair growth journey to make up for lost length.

Because of my rapid improvement, Dr. Nava wanted to remove the feeding tube. Dr. Jones, my nutritionist, was also on board with the decision. I must admit, I was nervous about getting off the tube. I've grown used to the dumb thing, and I was worried the effort would be all for nothing. What if I still couldn't swallow? What if I end up vomiting my food again?

Regardless of my internal protests, it was removed. And it felt so gross.

I've also been seeing my psychiatrist and psychotherapist. It hasn't all been sunshine and rainbows. My nightmares about Zircon Moon have been plaguing me every night to the point I wake up in a cold sweat, thinking I was back in that dingy cell. The angry faces of my family and

Chapter 20 – The Recovery

pack members were extremely vivid, but sometimes the nightmares cast their faces in an ominous shadow so I wouldn't know who was sneering at me or hitting me.

The worst nightmares were Neron and his father beating me to death. They call me names, damn me to hell, and pummel me with their fists and feet repeatedly. I couldn't go back to sleep after that. My mind, when asleep, often slips into the black trenches, picking what memory to torment me with. A full night's sleep was a luxury. It was only after my nightmares with that one guard who raped me surfaced that I was prompted to have sessions with Mayra twice a week as opposed to once a week.

Dr. Khan had diagnosed me with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder alongside depression. The diagnosis came to no surprise, for I was a walking trauma tank. I was still debating whether to go on medication, but I was glad I have the option to choose. ¹

Besides that, I've grown closer with some members of Garnet Moon. I was proud to call Jackie one of my closest friends, but Artemis will


Chapter 20 – The Recovery

always be my number one. I haven't seen Dwayne much since he was often accompanying his father to other pack territories for Beta business, but I was glad to have a friend like him around.

Anthony and I were also good friends, and I finally had the chance to meet his mate, Alesia. Tall, Latina with luscious long auburn hair, olive-brown eyes, a fierce warrior—she had all the makings to be a wonderful Luna. I've seen her train and fight with the warriors and Deltas, and I must say, I wouldn't want to have her as my opponent. She could lay five men down on their backs without breaking a sweat while I watch in complete awe. I aspire to be like her one day.

Lyria and I were much closer now, she was like a big sister to me. She introduced me to the world of fashionable clothes and makeup. My vanity table, now, had many makeup palettes and other cosmetics she recommended me to try out. As for clothes or if she was bored, she goes on shopping trips and she drags me along. My full closet was already twice as full thanks to her. I could never thank her enough for helping me feel like a woman.

Chapter 20 – The Recovery

I'm sitting at the island in the pack kitchen, watching Lead Omega Cleo cut up some strawberries for an avocado toast because I heard it was extremely popular with humans and I wanted to try it. This would be the first food I've eaten since my doctor removed the feeding tube. I had nerves on top of nerves. Per Dr. Nava's advice, it was recommended I go for the lighter foods before I turn to heavier ones to get back into the groove. 

"I'll never understand the hype over avocado." I see Jackie, sporting a sports bra and matching leggings, rummaging through the fridge. Judging by the sweat rolling down her shoulders, she'd just come from training. "First it's with the humans and now you're drooling over it! It tastes like the void in space, nothing!"

"Depends on the avocado." Lead Omega Cleo replied nonchalantly, removing the core. "What do you want, sweetheart? I could whip something up for you."

"No, it's fine." The woman pulled out a clear, cold bottle of water. "I was looking for this!" Guzzling the contents down, she sparingly

Chapter 20 – The Recovery

glances at me. “Are you up for eating?”

“I think so.” I replied with my confidence deflating faster than a popped balloon. “Dr. Nava gave me the green light to attempt eating on my own. I’m hoping nothing goes wrong.” I shrugged. “Having the tube was fine, but I miss normal eating.”

“Well, you’re bouncing back pretty well.” She walked over and gave me a side hug. I instantly cringed, feeling her sticky, smelly sweat.

“Ew. Go take a shower!”

“I know I don’t smell that bad!” Jackie chuckled with a dazzling smile, jogging back out to the front yard to continue training. Not long after, Lyra came in, her hazel lights lighting up upon seeing me.

“Good morning, *Mija*.” She kissed my forehead, pinching my cheeks. Lyra and I developed a close relationship, and I couldn’t be any happier. She was like the mother I never got. There were some instances where I accidentally let ‘Mom’ slip out, hoping she wouldn’t notice, but if she did, she

Chapter 20 – The Recovery

never gave it away. Alpha Nikolai treats me kindly too, acting as my missing father figure. His hugs were as warm as embers in a fireplace and his compassion never failed to make me feel safe in his presence. I'd seek him out when I have internal conflicts, like joining the pack. He assured me he was a patient man and would wait for my answer, no matter how long it took. Knowing my hesitation with strangers, he reminds me ahead of time, taking that extra length to make me feel comfortable.

"Morning!" I smile. "Did you sleep well?"

"Yes. All things considering." I was about to ask what she meant by that until I noticed the bright pink hue on her cheeks. And Cleo shoots a very knowing look. It didn't take me long to put two and two together.

"Ew."

"Here you go, hun." Lead Omega Cleo handed me a plate with two pieces of toast with slices of avocado, strawberries, and a sprinkle of chia seeds. Accompanied with this small breakfast was a glass of fresh orange juice. I gulped, gazing at

Chapter 20 – The Recovery

my food with a thin-lined smile, unsure of how to proceed. Picking up the piece of toast, I look for the best corner for my first bite. The older women eye me carefully, prepared for any adverse reactions I may have.

I feel like a zoo animal.

“Here goes nothing,” I mutter. I bit gently into a soft corner, savoring the combination of sweet, buttery, and crunchy. The sweet taste of strawberry exploded in my mouth, with the nutty avocado flavor accompanying it. The chia seeds were a pleasant touch, adding a nice crunch. Bracing myself, I swallowed slowly, feeling the mass swim down my esophagus before plopping in my stomach.

I waited. The women waited. My stomach toiled and tumbled for a moment before settling down. I sat, expecting the usual wave of nausea to hit me, but it didn't. I drank a bit of the orange juice, soothing my parched throat. Nothing happened! The next thing I knew, I was scarfing down both pieces of fruity toast and guzzling the orange juice.

Chapter 20 – The Recovery

“Yes!” I cheered, fist-pumping the air. “I did it!” I could finally eat like a normal person again! Cleo clapped for me and Lyra hugged me with uncontained, powerful love. Two months on a feeding tube finally paid off!

“I’m so proud of you, *Bebita*.” Lyra muttered in my ear, rubbing soothing circles on my back.

“This is an amazing accomplishment! But we still have to follow your nutrition plan until the coast is clear.”

“I know. It just feels good to eat like this again.”

“Well, if you need anything, my dear, don’t hesitate to find me or the other Omegas.” Lead Omega Cleo replied with a smile. Cleo was an older woman, arising from Italy. She usually ties her blond hair in a ponytail and her pale green eyes hold love and dedication. Grabbing the pitcher, she refilled my cup, and I happily drank the sweet drink down. “Speaking of food, I still need to come up with a menu for the Passage of the Alpha ceremony.”

The juice sprayed out of my mouth like a wild garden hose, sending me into a coughing fit.

Chapter 20 – The Recovery

Immediately, Lyra patted my back to calm me down. "T-The ceremony?"

"Yes." Lyra nodded. "Since Anthony is mated with Alesia, we thought it'd be good to have the ceremony where not only he selects his new Beta and Gamma, but Alesia accepts her Lunaship. It's next Saturday."

That's right. Anthony and Alesia were destined for the throne. How could I have forgotten? Next Saturday is a full moon. An icy chill swam down my spine, and a dull ache encompassed the scar on my back. I knew for a fact that this ceremony would not be like the last one I 'went' to, but I couldn't help but worry and feel terrified.

"I-I don't think I should go," I admit sadly. "I might mess it up."

"Why would you—oh." The Luna came over and rubbed her hand on my back again, moving toward my shoulder where my scar lay. "I understand. This ceremony doesn't bring you joy, given your past. You don't have to attend if you don't want to."

Chapter 20 – The Recovery

“B-but I want to.” I insisted. “I want to be there to support Anthony.”

“Don’t force yourself to do something if you know it would hurt you.” All three of us jerked our heads behind to see both Anthony and Alesia walking in, hand-in-hand. The sight of them made me smile, they are such a cute couple. “As much as I want to show you what a true passage ceremony is like, don’t risk your mental health for it.”

“And we don’t want you to feel uncomfortable in any way.” Alesia came over and hugged me gently. Her body was like a soothing pyre, encircling me in unnatural warmth. Her scent of raspberries and sugar was pleasant to my nose. Her duality in nature intrigues me, she could be a fierce, formidable opponent one minute, then kind and nurturing the next. “But we leave that choice up to you. We’d love to have you witness us becoming Alpha and Luna, but we’ll understand if you decide to skip the ceremony.”

I look down at my fidgeting fingers, unable to sit still in my seat. Everyone was giving me the power to make my own decisions, and they

Chapter 20 – The Recovery

weren't angry at my hesitation. Part of me wanted to experience what a celebratory event with a pack was like, and witness my friends become the new leaders. But it scares the other part of me. I bring disaster wherever I go. What if something goes wrong because I showed my face? I wish my mind wasn't working against me, constantly reminding me I ruined Neron's ceremony because I triggered his hatred.

I spare a glance at Alesia, then to Anthony. "Um. Can I have some time to think about it?"

Alesia smiled warmly. "Sweetie take all the time you need. It's a big decision."

I take a sip of my orange juice, listening to Lyra suggesting menu options with the mated couple adding in their input. I have a week to decide if I want to go or not, but I needed to deal with these goddamn memories first.

At least I have something to talk about with my therapist today.

Chapter 20 – The Recovery

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Mary Fee

came...as...no surprise



7

HauntedMachines728

This is absolutely not how a diet progresses for someone ...



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40

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