

## Saving Lulu

I worked my way toward the sound, occasionally sning the air to see what I was up against. The wind wasn't working with me. I was upwind of whatever it was and I was only smelling the scents that were in this part of the forest.

From time to time, there would be a little shriek and I would get my bearings from it. I came to a place where the ground dropped away. There were some trees in my way, but I could make out a mostly clear path below. I got as close to the edge as I could without revealing myself.

Movement caught my eye. A man was struggling with a child. She was kicking at him as he carried her with his hand over her mouth. He was grumbling and grunting.

The girl pulled her face back, then seemed to almost lunge forward. The man shouted and dropped her. She screamed. It was the scream I had heard before. The girl turned to run, but the man grabbed one of her pigtails and jerked her back.

"You bite me again and I'm going to pull every one of your teeth out, bitch." He snarled.

The girl fell to the ground and went limp. I could see a bruise on her cheek and I had to stie a growl that started in my chest. The wind shifted and I caught the scent of the people below as the man tried to pick the girl up.

She was a werewolf pup. Since she looked close to six or seven, for a human, I was guessing she was about four or ve. Werewolf pups grew more quickly than human pups. I could also smell magic mixed with something rotten.

I'd smelled witches before, but they always had a bright scent, like something dried in the sunshine. He must be a dark witch. That explained a lot.

There had to be a way I could get the jump on him without him seeing me. Witches had all sorts of weird magic stuff that could mess a wolf up. I didn't even know what kind of witch he was, so I couldn't plan accordingly.

A little further down, I could see a place where the outcropping was just over the path. I could drop right onto him. I just needed to make sure I didn't hurt the pup.

Quietly, I let out a slight bark. The kind of quiet 'boof' sound of a canine on guard. From my hiding place, I could see the pup perk up. I didn't know if she'd understand what I wanted.

"Get off the damned ground or I'll kill you right here and go back for your brother. Either one of you will do. They're all looking for you so there are fewer people to protect him." The man growled.

"No." She gasped. "Don't hurt my brother."

The girl got off the ground and the man grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her close to him. He bent down and got right in her face. I started sneaking off to my ambush point.

"If I have to go back for him, I'll kill the rest of them, too. You do as I say and you're the only one who has to die. Isn't that better than all the kids in your family?" He hissed.

"Y-yes. I'll go." The girl whispered.

I was tucked away in my ambush spot and saw him walking with her trailing behind, her little wrist in his tight grasp. The girl was pretty. She had a little pixie-like face with glossy black hair tied in twin pigtails. I could tell she was loved and cared for. Her parents wouldn't lose her if I had anything to do with it.

Just as they were about to pass under where I was hiding, I let out a tiny whine and the girl jerked back. The man had relaxed his grip enough that she was able to get free.

As he turned to strike her, I jumped onto him and knocked him onto his stomach. I wasn't going to wait for him to gure out what was going on. I closed my jaws around the back of his neck, put my paws on the middle of his back, bit down with all my might, and started jerking.

The man struggled for a little bit, then there was a popping, cracking, sound and he stopped moving. I released him and rolled him over. He was still alive. I'd internally decapitated him. He gurgled a little and I struck again, biting down and tearing out his throat.

Life drained from his eyes as his heart worked to pump blood through the arteries which were now severed. His blood seeped into the ground. I looked up at the little pup. She was staring at the dead man.

I tried to make myself as small as possible while I crawled over to her. I didn't want her to be scared, but she had to have seen that I wasn't someone she knew. I nosed at her hand and she jumped a bit, then she hugged me.

The little girl started crying as she held on to my neck. I knew I was getting the witch's blood on her, but she needed comfort. Poor little thing, she was trying so hard to be brave the whole time he had her.

"I want my mama and papa!" She sobbed.

Using my paw, I tried to pat her back. It was awkward, but it seemed to soothe her. I decided I would take her as close to her home as possible. She smelled like pack, so I didn't want to get too close to their borders. I'd leave her as close to them as I could, make it easy for warriors, or whoever was looking for her, to nd her.

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When she let go, I laid down and huffed at her. In my pack, this was something adult wolves would do to let children know they could climb on them. It seemed to be the same in her pack. She straddled my back and grabbed handfuls of my fur, lowering her body to be closer to mine, like riding a racing motorcycle.

I didn't want to run and risk losing her. I followed the scent of her and the man back the way they came. He took her through a little stream. I should have realized that. The bottoms of her pants and her shoes were wet. I crossed the stream and sniffed the ground, walking alongside it until I smelled their scent again.

She snied but hung on to me while I searched for her home. It was fairly comforting to me. I hadn't realized how touch-starved I was.

My nose was on the ground as I followed her scent. That was why I was surprised when a bronze and tan wolf jumped out in front of me. She was pretty large herself. At least Alpha size. She growled at me.

The rst reaction I had was to protect the pup. I was ready to run. I couldn't ght with her on my back, but I wouldn't let this wolf hurt her. I started backing away slowly, ready to turn and run.

This wolf smelled different, almost pack but also rogue. Not like an ex-pack rogue, like me, but a rogue who was somehow also pack. I doubted most wolves would be able to tell the difference, but my sense of smell was always a little keener, even before I manifested Heather's sense of smell was stronger. She smelled things better than others.

I quickly realized one thing, the little girl smelled similar to this wolf. I was certain it was her mother and stopped my slow retreat. I needed to give her daughter back and get away.

The wolf stalked closer with her teeth bared. She probably smelled her pup, but couldn't see her. I lowered myself to the ground. This was partly to let her see her pup and partly as a sign of submission. The power coming off the wolf told me she wasn't one to mess with.

"Mama!" The girl squealed.

Rapidly, the wolf shifted into a small woman who rushed to me and took her pup off my back. She wrapped the little girl in her arms and cradled her against her body.

"Oh, Lulu, baby. I'm so glad you're safe. My little angel. Oh, Goddess, I was so scared." The woman crooned.

"The wolf killed the man." Lulu told her mom.

The woman looked down at me with tears in her eyes. I could tell she truly was afraid of having lost her pup. I was hoping she would be grateful enough to let me go. She was an Alpha. I could feel that power, but not a pack Alpha, and I realized Lulu was a pack Alpha pup.

"Thank you for saving my pup. I'm sorry I growled at you. My wolf and I could smell her on you and there was all the blood, but we couldn't see her. You thought fast. I was ready to kill you."

I'd forgotten about the blood. I should have cleaned myself in the stream, but I didn't really think I'd be encountering another wolf. I was so careful, but she seemed to come out of nowhere.

"Oh, goddess! I know who you are. They call you the Ghost Wolf. I was lucky you were in the area when my Lulu went missing. We all read about how you save human children. I'm glad you save wolf children, too." The woman said.

A man in shorts came running up the path behind her. He had some cloth in his hand and passed it to the woman as she handed the girl off. He started kissing and nuzzling Lulu. That must be her father.

He was tall, like most werewolves. His shoulders were broad and I could see that his muscles were very well-dened. He had the same glossy black hair as his daughter, but it had some slightly gray wings at his temple. What was most remarkable was that he was really beautiful. Like not handsome, beautiful. Especially for an older guy.

Most importantly, I was right. Lulu smelled like a mix of him and her mother. The power coming off this guy was the power of an Alpha. I prayed this was enough of a favor to save me from being killed.

His mate slipped on the dress he'd brought her and turned to me. She had the same pixie-like face as her daughter, with bronze hair and caramel-colored eyes. The most remarkable thing about her was how short she was. She looked about Heather's height.

"Come with us. We'll get you cleaned up and a safe place to sleep for the night. I've been wanting to meet you for a few years now. I'm Queen Bellamy Deveraux. This is my husband, Alpha Lucien Deveraux. And our eldest daughter, future Alpha Lunette Deveraux. We're about a half-mile from the border of Lune Rouge, do you know where you are?" She asked.

I knew I was in Oregon, in the territory of the Eaten Heart Collective, so I nodded. I knew I wouldn't die today. I was an honorary member. She smiled brightly.

"Stand up and come with us." Queen Bellamy said.

There was really nothing I could do. If I didn't stand and follow, she might get angry. Maybe she could help me wake Heather up. She might grant me a favor for saving her daughter. I didn't know how to communicate my problem to her, though.

"We don't have any more clothes to help keep you warm, so I'll need you to stay in wolf form until we get to the pack lands. You're completely safe. I've already linked the guards and everyone who was out looking for Lulu. No one will attack you." She promised.

Dipping my head, I nodded and followed them as she and her mate walked along, him carrying their daughter, and her keeping an eye on me. It was either to make sure I didn't attack his back or I didn't run away. Both made sense.

The sun dipped very low as we walked. It was the time of year when the sun started going down earlier. It meant I got a lot more sleep because I rarely wandered at night. It wasn't really the best time for hunting. Most things were settled in for the night.

I could smell the pack border as we approached. I stopped at the edge of it. It had been years since I was in a pack's lands. It brought back memories of leaving our pack and rejecting everything we'd ever known. There was no stopping the whine that came from me.

"I assure you, my pack is safe and you are considered a hero to us. You saved our future Alpha and brought her home. You are an honored guest, Miss Wolf." Alpha Lucien told me.

"If you're scared because you haven't been in a pack's land since you left or were banished, don't be. I know you were told that you've been made an honorary member of my collective. I'm your queen. I won't let anyone in my territory harm you. I promise."

She sounded sincere. Lulu was looking at me hopefully, even though her parents appeared very calm and steady. They made it seem as if they wanted me to come with them but would prefer if it were my choice instead of their order. I liked that.

In our old pack, the ranked members would just order people to do things. This place was better. I took a step forward and crossed the pack border.

Nothing happened. I wasn't immediately struck down by the goddess. I didn't automatically feel pressure to bend to the will of others. I felt safe.

"Let's go home. I have the omegas preparing a tub of water to get that blood off your fur before we go in the house. I don't want the little ones to get scared." Queen Bellamy said as we walked on.

This was it. This had to be the place I'd nally end up waking Heather. I hoped she wouldn't be upset that we wouldn't be spending our birthday on the beach.