

Chapter 26: Exhaustion

Yara

I've never encountered this type of injury before. In humans, someone with this type of throat injury would be dead. So, I'm terrified that I'm going to do something wrong. While it's not out of the realm of possibility that she could still die on me, even if I save her life, I can't guarantee that she'll be able to swallow like normal, or even speak again. 1

"You're doing great, Luna," Savannah says to me.

I glance at her and I don't know what she sees on my face, but she nods. "You're doing great."

I refocus on Piper's throat. I'm using every little bit of knowledge I have about anatomy to try and stitch her up properly. The throat isn't an easy place to stitch.

"Luna, the other warriors are stitched up. Alpha Warren sent them back to the packhouse to get cleaned up and get some rest," Anna says, coming in and looking at Piper.

"You should go get some sleep too, Anna."

"I can stay, Luna. Me, Katie, and Eliza are going to rotate to keep watch on Beta Charlie and Piper today while you get some rest. If anything happens to either of them, we'll let you know," she says, including the other two nurses that I've barely had a chance to work with. I know that they are doing a pretty good job though, because

Haynes was healing nicely when I saw him earlier, so I feel comfortable that they can look after Charlie. I'm not confident about Piper though. She will be in critical condition for a while.

"I'll need to speak with them, Anna. I haven't spent any time with them and all three of you need to understand how critical Piper is. Even after she wakes up, she's going to need time to heal," I say as I finally finish with the last stitch.

"I'll bandage her, Luna," Savannah says.

I nod and turn to Anna. "Are they here? I can give instructions to all of you at one time."

Anna goes to get the other two and after formally introducing myself to them, I explain what they need to look for with Piper, that if she wakes up, she's only allow liquids and she's not allowed to speak out loud.

"Yes, Luna. We'll look after her," Katie says.

"We'll come get you if anything changes," Eliza says.

I look at them and realize that Katie is the one who is pregnant. "Katie, how is your pregnancy going?"

"It's going well, I think, Luna. One day when we aren't in the aftermath of a battle, I'd like you to take a look at this little one."

"Maybe I can do that later today," I say, feeling the adrenaline rush from before flowing out of me as if someone uncorked a bottle and dumped it upside down.

"Whenever you get a chance, Luna," she says.

"When's the last time you ate?" Savannah asks, coming up to join our group.

"I don't even know what time it is," I say.

"Mid-afternoon, Luna. You've been in surgery for hours."

I nod. The days have blended together since I've been here, I honestly don't know what day it is or what time it is, much less when I last ate.

"I'm going to go get some sleep," I say, feeling the exhaustion hitting me hard, making it feel like I'm walking through concrete. "You need some too, Savannah."

"Yes, Luna," I say, looking at Piper one more time before stepping out of the room.

All I want to do is crawl into bed. I'm so tired, that I don't even have the strength to wash the blood off of me. I pull my gloves off, tossing them in a bin as I walk into the hospital waiting room.

I look up and see Warren. He's waiting for me. He stands looking at me intently. Without saying a word, he opens his arms for me.

I feel my lips begin to tremble as everything from the last few days begins crashing down on me; my fear for Piper, my anger at Simon, my hunger, my lack of sleep, my worry about the warriors in this pack, my fight with Warren...all of it hits me as the adrenaline that has kept me going dissipates. I lose the battle with my tears and a moment

later I feel Warren's strong arms wrap around me, embracing me as if he knows that I'll shatter into pieces unless he holds me together. I cling to him, like he's a life preserver in a stormy sea and without him, I'll drown in my emotions.

"Come on, baby. Let's get you to our room," he says gently, scooping me into his arms.

"Get back in bed. You can argue with your Luna about coming off the injured reserve list when she's stronger," he says. I'm assuming he's talking to Charlie, but I don't look. I lay my head on his shoulder, tucking my face against his throat as he begins walking back to the packhouse.

As we walk, I take deep breaths of his teakwood scent, letting the mate bond calm me. I've heard of the power of the mate bond, but this is the first time that I think I've had a chance to truly test it. I hear Arric begin purring, the sound rumbling in his chest and against my ear, lulling me into something like a trance. I'm aware, but not fully awake.

I know the moment we stepk into the packhouse as the murmuring stops. Still, I don't look up and Warren doesn't stop. I feel him climbing the stairs to our bedroom and when we walk in, I take gulping breaths of his scent in our room. 1

He doesn't lay me on the bed, instead going into the bathroom. He stands a moment, then sits on the side of the bathtub and turns on the water, keeping me in his arms.

"I'm going to take your clothes off, Yara, and then I'm going to bathe you. You're covered in blood. I know you're tired, but you'll be happy

to be clean when you wake up.”

I nod, too tired to speak.

He sits me on the sink and pulls the shirt, his shirt, over my head. “Hold on to me,” he says softly, putting me on my feet and pushing his shorts off me. I feel him removing his too and then he carefully pulls his shirt off while still holding me up.

Then he picks me up and steps into the bathtub, sitting and putting me in between his legs.

“Just lean back against me,” he says.

I do and he begins running the warm water over my tired body.

“When’s the last time you ate, Yara?” he asks softly as he continues to rinse me off.

“I don’t know.”

He kisses the side of my head, then begins pouring the warm water over my hair. We’re quiet as he washes my hair, rinsing it and replacing the soapy water in the tub before beginning to wash my body.

I feel my fear for Piper pushing forward again.

“What if she doesn’t make it, Warren?” I whisper, choking back a sob.

I feel the washcloth pause before he continues. “Then you’ll know you did everything you could to save her and Simon will die an even slower death for killing that sweet girl.”

I feel my lips trembling. "What if..." I hiccup, trying to hold back my tears. "What if she survives but can't speak? What if she can't swallow? What if surviving is worse than dying because I wasn't able to stitch her throat properly?"

I feel him rubbing his face against my head, kissing me as he thinks.

"We'll figure it out, Yara. If there's a specialist that we can bring in to work with her, I'll do it. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. You're an incredible doctor and Piper, while young, is strong with a strong wolf. It may take her some time to fully heal, so let's not rush it. Let's wait and see how she is tomorrow."

I nod, then sigh as I feel him gently washing my body. I can't remember the last time someone took care of me, definitely not like this. Alpha Solomon was kind, but he was a busy man.

"Just so you know, this feels an awful lot like kindness and compassion," I tell him.

I feel Arric's purr, which hasn't stopped, increase in intensity.

"I consider this taking care of my mate. But if this counts as kindness and compassion, maybe it won't be as hard for me as I thought," he says, kissing the side of my head again. "Sleep, Yara. I'll take care of you." 1

If you had asked me if I'd ever be able to fall asleep in a bathtub with a naked Alpha washing my body, I'd have probably laughed in your face. But between my own exhaustion, Arric's purring, and Warren's assurance that I'm safe, I fall into a deep, deep sleep.