The next several hours or so became a blur. Memories buried by unconsciousness and noise I barely understood. What I did know was that everybody onboard were either bruised or flung towards the bow like ragdolls. Me and Lowell were included, even as I lost my grip onto Hector, and my wolf clutched him in his arms during the rough landing. Screams above and below us filled in the empty space between crashing wood and breaking glass. Then, I lost my vision when something struck my forehead.

The concussion consisted of drowsiness, fluxuating between a dull ache and throbbing, pounding pain in my cranium, like my first hangover with Lowell. It made me want to keep my eyes closed shut.

Speaking of Lowell though, he refused to let that happen, shaking my shoulder until he compelled me to stand up. Even if it made me want to fall back down kneeling.

The beaching struck faster than expected. It didn’t matter if Johanna mentioned earlier that she’d have Nick slow us down upon arrival. A hyperventilating but alive she-wolf told us the enemy was incoming. They were coming in for the kill: us.

While Nancy had the luxury of being inside a broom closet so she wouldn’t be tossed around the deck, me, Lowell, and Hector didn’t have that very same option. Tears welled up in my eyelids at the floor. A battered, bloody, and bruised fennec fox curled up in the fetal position, his forehead cracked open like a chicken egg, his skull’s contents thankfully obscured by Lowell’s fingers as they tried to not make me see.

“—Adam, we need to go!” He barked into my ears. “They’re fuckin’ coming!”

“Can’t leave him like this!” I wailed, only for my boyfriend’s sharp fingernails to grip the back of my neck, pulling me down a corridor leading to the front of the ship. “Hector, HECTOR!”

I felt like passing out. Everything happened everywhere at once under my brain’s attempt at self-destruction by letting me fall asleep; Lowell bringing me to the stern of the yacht, half-destroyed and haphazardly embedded into the sand and grassy stone. Timber trees filled my vision ahead. The scent of something burning filled the *Sunset Evandescent*’s starboard side.

The other cell members already finished climbing out of the beached vessel, ducking when thunderstrikes filled everyone’s eardrums. Nancy and a limping Johanna returned firepower to whoever was shooting at us.

Sand and splinters flew into the air around us.

A scream somewhere almost cut off.

Olivia carried her brother on her back, falling down when a bullet struck the back of her leg. Jordan ran with Mr. and Mrs. Lange for trees as Blu provided cover, Stephen curled up under his foot. Further hails of gunfire followed at the yacht’s side as Nick tried firing rockets into the waters. Meanwhile, Abigail attempted to shield Jeannie, the tigress tumbling as she tried running.

Everything was going to Hell. Everything was going to Hell. This was the end…

…except it wasn’t. At least, not yet. Somewhere, God answered one of my past prayers.

As I struggled to stay awake, my bruised parents rushed suicidally to me and Lowell, the wolf keeping me on my toes punched the air. He cheered for a drone suddenly buzzing over our heads. The smoke trails of numerous missiles struck their targets, massacring the boats about to encroach on our yacht.

Another drone appeared. Followed by another. These deadly metallic angels were our salvation from the frothing fanatics desiring to commit numerous sins on our resistance cells in the name of their Lord. Soon enough, we heard shouting from the trees, as well as a helicopter coming overhead.

I happily looked to my relieved parents, to the cheering and absolutely beaming wolf by my side, then up to the clear blue sky. “Thank you…Thank you…”

 Memory left my conscious body soon after.

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 Of course, I didn’t die on that beach, or in Canadian shores. However, due to the concussion, adrenaline spike, and morphine injection provided by a Canadian Armed Forces medic, my long-term retention turned hazy for four or five hours. My lapsing consciousness did remember several scenes stored to long-term memory though.

 I remembered being placed on a large helicopter. As we took flight, the same medic, a French-accented white cat named Renee, asking me questions about myself, my medical history, then turning to my father and mother when my answered became incomprehensible. Lowell was nowhere to be found.

 I remembered smelling burnt oil and seeing bellowing smoke in my blind spot. Wherever the helicopter landed, there had been a battle recently. When I’d turned my head in the direction, I saw an airport tarmac littered by a crashed plane and concrete carnage.

 I remembered this intense white light. For a moment, I thought the Grim Reaper decided on a whim to send me to Heaven, until a masked doctor and a familiar ferret surveyed me, making me answer every question they mustered. Another injection of morphine later, I’d been transported into a furnished hospital room.

I remembered being carefully guided into a loose gown after bandaging my head and around my twitching tabby ears, draped me in a soft blanket on an even more comfortable bed, then made me answer even more questions off the tip of my tongue.

 Lastly, I remembered being connected to an IV drip and drifting in and out of consciousness, the only passage of time being a windowsill with the curtains half-drawn. My only visitors were doctors and a kind nurse, though I did hear loud arguments vibrate outside the closed door. At one point, Jordan in scrubs stood at the foot of my bed, discussing my recovery under his care with Renee and the nurse, a lanky she-bear without a nametag. Also, I remembered the nurse tuning the TV to a music channel, during which, she skipped over a news report about Texas seceding from the Devout States of America. Not to mention the sudden gains made by the Western Republic over the Rocky Mountains, as well as the complete systematic annihilation of the pariah nation’s resistance cells across its remaining borders.

 “Huh?” I tiredly gasped. “What the…did that…happen?”

 “Shh, you need your rest, hun.” The she-bear placed the remote on my nightstand and stared down at me with such sympathy in her golden eyes. “You went through the ringer out there. All of you did. You sacrificed so much, but for now, you need to sleep and recover.”

 Something else sharply came to mind.

 “M-My parents…the others?” I asked weakly, still drowsy from the drugs they’d given me.

“Most of them are safe and sound, but…that one fennec fox?” She sighed deeply, her lower lip quivering. “I…I’m very, truly sorry. There’s nothing we could’ve done.”

Hector. How much I longed to hear him argue with my boyfriend and me again.

My tail thrashed in immediate remembrance. “L-Lowell? W-Where is he?”

 “Get your rest, Mr. Grimwald,” she reassured me. “These next couple of days are critical for healing that concussion of yours, and you can’t do too much critical thinking or exercise until we’re certain you’ll make a full recovery.”

 I tried arguing further, but the allure of falling asleep proved too great. My final thoughts before losing consciousness yet again was the sheer irony of my predicament. Little more than six months prior, I’d been given drugs to help me heal. The biggest crucial difference being that they’d actually help me recover, then wake up to a brave new world alongside my comrades.

*We made. We’re freer than ever.*