

Alpha's Hunt by Starlight Chapter 17

Chapter 17 The shortest route

My legs ached, my arms were sluggish, my eyes heavy and my mind numb.

“Luke,” I groan

“Shut up,”

“I'm tired!” I whine

The b***** doesn't even bother to look back and keeps walking. For the love of the moon, it's almost night! He didn't even let us stop for lunch and I just had to eat while walking.

“Why can't we just stop and sleep?” I ask him, indignation fueling my limbs to keep working

“Because this is a long path,” Luke says, I might just be imagining things but he sounds terse “We can't waste a single second.”

“Are there shorter paths?” I jog a little to match his pace

“Yes,” Luke says, staring straight ahead “The shorter the path, the more dangerous it becomes.”

I worry about my bottom lip. If we take a shorter path, our chance of winning will... well, remain the same. Because our chances of dying will increase. Multifold.

“Just how dangerous are we talking about?” I ask

“Enough to not be taken by me.” Luke spares me a glance

My eyebrows shoot to my hairline “Are you scared?”

Luke stops abruptly, the storm in his eyes intensifies.

“This is what I’ve been preparing for the past 5 years,” He says, slowly, precisely, each word hard as stone “You think I’m not ready to do what it takes?”

I swallow thickly, feeling as if I’m walking on thin ice, unsure of where to put my next step.

“Then why follow this path?” I ask him carefully

“Before you ask that again,” Luke stares down at me distastefully “Keep in mind who my partner is.”

Right. A weak little omega. Me. I would’ve argued with him, snapped at him but deep down, I know he’s right. I know this isn’t what I’ve been prepared for. I was groomed for making food and cleaning a place so perfectly you’d think it’s never used. I was trained to be polite and respectful towards higher ranks.

And you failed at that too.

Ignoring my sour thoughts about my training, I silently follow Luke. Luke has been training for this Hunt for the past 5 years. Luke who I know, even without his werewolf abilities, is capable of taking the most dangerous path and surviving it.

The contents of my contract flash in my mind;

If and only if Luke Winters manages to win the Alpha's hunt, Elise Attwood and her mother, Juliet Attwood will be allowed to leave the pack without severing their connection to the pack, to not declare their rouge.

If Luke doesn't win, it'll be all for nothing. If we keep to the longer path, it's a possibility that some other team will take the shorter path and win.

Well past midnight, we finally stop. I'd learned how to make a fire and it's my turn to do that, Luke's turn to keep watch. As we sit by the flickering flames, I glance at the map Luke has laid out before him.

I can see the markings of each path, red crosses to depict traps on places during previous hunts. The shortest line is almost ridden with crosses.

"Since when have you started taking an interest in the map?" Luke asks, snapping me out of my thoughts

I level him with my most serious face "I think we should take the shortest path."

Luke holds my gaze for a moment. For a moment I think he's going to agree. For a moment, hope flickers before my eyes.

"No."

My face crumples in disappointment "Why not?"

"I can't keep you safe all the time," Luke says. The unspoken words hang in the still air, and you won't survive on your own.

I lick my dry lips "You don't have to."

“Hazel, you might’ve been able to fend for yourself if you could shift,” Luke says unapologetically “But you can’t. You’re only going to end up dead.”

I open my mouth to argue, to ask why he gives two s***s if I die but Luke holds up a hand.

“Just because you refuse to acknowledge it, wouldn’t change reality,” He says

I clench my jaw, unsure if I’m angrier at Luke or myself or this stupid hunt and its stupid tricks.

I lay out my sleeping bag and shuffle in, ignoring the dull sting behind my eyes. Why can’t he just trust me for once? I can take it, I can survive.

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Oh really? Can you?

As I lay in the sleeping bag, eyes closed in frustration, I vow to myself that I’m going to find a way to make this work.

Luke needs to win this hunt. There’s too much at stake now.

✧ Luke’s POV ✧

The moon comes out from behind the clouds, a half-moon. Incomplete.

I pinch the bridge of my nose as I fold up the map. If we keep going like that, there is going to be a stack of odds against us.

I glance at Hazel, even while sleeping, her brows are furrowed. My mind wanders to her words only a few hours ago.

If we could take a shorter route, we could most definitely win. Well, at least I could win.

But she can't take it.

Apart from I wanted to throw caution out of the window and just take a shorter path, no matter how dangerous. I shouldn't worry about whether or not Hazel can make it. She's on the hunt for her reasons, if she dies, it's on her.

But despite everything, you can't throw someone in the path of death.

With a sigh, I lean my back against a tree and prop my knees up, using them as armrests. My mind stumbles between morals and goals. This Hunt is my only chance, I can't lose it. A memory flashes in my head, gem-clear;

' "If you have any intention of finding her, this is the only way." Father sat in his office chair, his face stern as always

"Of course I want to find her, but," I bit my tongue, doubts swarmed in my head like wild hornets

"But what, Luke?" Father said impatiently "Without your mate, you know what you might end up as. Do you want that?"

I could feel the color draining from my face. Who in their right mindset would want that end? I wanted to find my mate, my cure, my peace but it was too dangerous. Too dangerous for anyone to be around me.

"What if I hurt someone?" I hated how quiet my voice sounded

“Listen to yourself,” Father pinched the bridge of his nose “You’re already 18, son. The sooner you find your mate, the better. Besides, we don’t know how long you have before...”

He stopped, silence descended the room like a heavy haze of summer heat. Intolerable, but not removable.

“Luke,” He reached across his desk to put a hand on my shoulder “you have everything it takes to lead this pack. You would be a great Alpha and I’m proud of the man you’ve become, but you can’t avoid this.”

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I let out a breath and nodded “I know, Father.”

“Good,” he withdrew his hand “Pack what’s necessary, I’ll inform the Silver claw pack of your arrival. You can handle it from there?”

I nodded once again as Father went to pick up his phone. I turned around, feeling as though my shoulders are being weighted by boulders. But I kept them straight, held my head high. An Alpha shows no weakness. He can’t afford to.

“One more thing,” Father’s voice rang in my ears, I stopped at the threshold “Casper will be going with you.”

A little weight on my shoulders eased. At least I could count on Casper to help me out if things got bad.

I left my father’s office and walked through the wide halls of the packhouse. Goddess knew when I’d see this place again. Or if I’d ever see it again at all.

The reality of my situation settled like heavy stones in the pits of my stomach. An anxious riot started in my head, the buzz from the light bulbs was unbearably loud, the foot's steps of pa**ing people were like a stampede, I could see my hands shaking. It was happening, the pre-effects.

Air. I needed air.

Taking hurried steps towards the gardens, I gulped in the fresh air, trying to clear my mind. Panic would only make things worse.

‘Oomph,’ my hypersensitive senses heard a voice

Unbidden, my head whipped towards the source. About ten yards away, where the fruit trees were planted, I saw a small figure on the ground. I took a few unsure steps forward, trying to see who it was.

Braided golden brown hair caught the failing light of the sun. ‘Of course,’ I thought to myself ‘it’s the problematic omega.’

Elise Attwood. The most peculiar omega I had ever seen. I leaned against a nearby tree, thankful for a distraction.

“Stupid tree,” she muttered to herself as she began climbing again

She dropped back on the ground. I felt my lips twitching upward, the riot in my head slowly retreated as I focused on the fresh air and the ridiculous sight in front of me. She was so bad at climbing it was hard not to laugh. Yet I couldn’t help but wonder why she wouldn’t just give up and go back to the quarters.

“What are you doing here?” I turned around to see Casper

“Nothing,” I pushed myself off the tree and stood straight “I was just getting some fresh air.”

“We don’t have much time, the Alpha wants us gone as soon as possible.” He’d said, “Like we’re some pests.”

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“I don’t know about myself, but you are a pest,” I said as we started towards the mansion

Casper gasped like an overdramatic actress “How could you!”

Bickering, we went to the packhouse. People nodded at me, smiled, some even waved as we pa**ed by them. All those people were counting on me to lead this pack one day, to keep all of them safe.

As I packed my things, only one thought occupied my mind.

I’m going to find a way to fix this, no matter what it takes.’

With a sigh, I close my eyes. Those words I’d said to myself so long ago are still carved in my heart like a pledge. Even if I didn’t find my mate, the Alpha supreme authority would be enough to—

Pain shoots through my head, my eyes snap open. Out of its own volition, my hand tore through my hair due to the agonizing pain. My hands start shaking, my body heating up, the sounds of the forest too loud.

Stumbling to my feet, I hurriedly open one of my bags. My clawed hands trash around in it, the pain threatening to crack open my skull. Finally, I find the small plastic bag I was looking for. Small gla** bottles clink together as I pull it out and take one of them. My fumbling fingers rip out the cork and I swallow the contents.

The fluid feels bitter on my tongue, burning my throat. I breathe in through my nose and exhale through my mouth.

Slowly, steadily, my fingers turn back to normal, the pain recedes.

A small groan reaches my ears, I whip my head towards Hazel. She shifts around in her sleep, but she doesn't wake up.

You're running out of time, Winters. Do something before it's too late.

I look up at the half-moon. Soon enough it won't be so incomplete.

I glance at Hazel again. Raking my head for a way she can be strong enough to survive the shorter path. A way we can both get through this alive.

I toss the empty bottle back inside the bag, the weapons shine dimly in the pale moonlight. Mindlessly, I caress the barrel of a gun. A thought speeds through my head, my hand stops.

I am such an idiot for not thinking about this before.

Hours later, I see the sun coming up, birds start chirping, the fire dies down. A yawn reaches my ears, the sound of shuffling. I don't need to look back at Hazel to know she's up.

"Good morning," she mumbles

My lips twitch upward. A good morning indeed.