

## Alpha's Hunt by Starlight Chapter 31

Chapter 31 I really hate weeds

The forest is getting thicker.

It's so thick that there's barely room for walking. The vines are heavy and thick like a maiden's wet hair after a bath.

"I feel like I'm walking on snakes," I mutter under my breath

Luke had to take out a sharp dagger and cut down the vines hanging in our path, and they fall to the ground like green snakes.

We seldom talk during our travel, partially because Luke is as talkative as a rock, partially because I don't want to fall into this forestry and I have to focus on my movements.

I look up at the sky, only to have my vision obscured by thick branches and leaves. I can't see a thing.

"What time is it?" I ask Luke, starting after him again

"Almost 7 in the evening," he replies, effortlessly cutting through the vines

"Almost 7?" my eyes widen "No wonder I feel like my legs are made of jelly!"

"You want to camp here?"

I look around the suffocating environment and speed up to fall in step beside him "what do you suggest then?"

"I suggest we go on until we find a place capable of staying at."

"And how long until we reach that place?" I ask

"As flattering as it is that you think I know everything," Luke casts me a cool glance from the corner of his eyes "I

don't."

"You've disappointed me beyond measure."

My humor is greeted by silence.

"Well, then check that cursed map of yours," I say, ducking a freshly cut stack of vines as they drop

"That cursed piece of paper is our biggest weapon," Luke says, making no move to go through his bag

"Forgive me for my ignorance, I should respect thy sacred map," I say in a grave voice  
"What does thy sacred map show, Sire Luke?"

"It shows something wet," Luke says "and slimy."

I only have a moment to catch the meaning behind his words when he stops and I almost fall into the swamp ahead.

Hurriedly steadying myself, I a\*\*ess the swamp that stretches to at least the next fifteen feet.

Luke snaps a branch from a nearby tree and bends down, to dip it into the swamp.

I realize what he's doing and my nose crinkles "I don't want to wade through it."

"As good as that sounds, we cant do that." Luke says, letting the branch be completely s\*\*\*ed up by the swamp "It's pretty deep."

Pursing my lips, I let my gaze wander. Only a moment later, I look up at the towering trees.

"We can use a fallen tree as a bridge," I say

"I doubt our luck can provide us that," Luke says, getting up "We'll have to help ourselves."

"Luke, not that I doubt you, but," I say and pat the truck of a tree "I don't think your dagger can cut through this in less than a millennium."

He lets the bag and dagger drop, with a roll of his shoulders, he a\*\*es the tree I just patted.

"I don't need a dagger for this, Hazel," Luke says, gently steering me aside

I have to hold back a chuckle. Is he going to attempt breaking it off to stroke his ego?

"Luke, you can just—

Words die on my tongue as he rams his shoulder into the heavy trunk of the tree, causing it to shake furiously.

Luke pulls back, only to repeat the application of force. Once. Twice. The tree rips off its roots.

Breathing heavily, a few rebellious drops of sweat on his temple, Luke flashes me a quick crooked smile.

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“You were saying, Hazel?” he lifts my chin as he approaches, closing my mouth

Blood rushes to my face but I refuse to let him have the smugness and huff.

“I was saying we can’t just destroy trees,” I say, walking towards the fallen tree “But well.”

“Then maybe you’d like to wade through the swamp, Hazel.” A voice says from behind me

“And let the tree’s death be fruitless?” I ask, eyes wide in dramatic horror “I’d rather not.”

Luke’s eyes narrow a fraction but he leaves it at that as he picks up his things and starts after me on the bridge.

As we reach the center of the tree trunk, it starts getting thinner and I open my arms to keep my balance.

I can do this, I take a few wobbly steps forward, I can definitely—

A yelp p\*\*es my lips as I begin tipping towards the left and my eyes widen in horrified anticipation as I stare at the

slimy green water when someone grabs my arm and pulls me back.

I spin on my heel, barely steadying myself when I see a certain Alpha now walking ahead of me.

“Are you alright, Hazel?” Luke glances at me over his shoulder “It seems like you need help.”

“I’m good,” I say, focusing on my steps and trying my best not to shove him down the bridge

With a shrug, Luke walks over the bridge with lithe, catlike steps, making it to the other side as easy as if he’d been

walking on the flat earth.

“Take your time, Hazel.” He says, crossing his arms “I’m figuring that it’ll take you a while.”

Indignation and irritation burn up my face and I narrow my eyes at him in determination. I’ll show you, you brat!

I take a few steps forward, wobble to the right, steady myself just barely and my momentum carries me forward,

I almost fall due to the now thin and wobbling stem of the tree.

As if my feet have a mind of their own and they love to dance, tripping and staggering, they waltz forward, and finally, I feel the earth under my feet.

“Made up!” my hands shoot up, a wide grin gracing my lips “Take that! I don’t have a drop of water—

The rest of my insults s\*\*\*ter away as I take a step forward— in mud and slip backward.

In the swamp.

I come up to the surface, disgustingly wet and slimy. You got me there, the irony.

A small sound reaches me, I look up to see Luke’s face turned sideways, but his dark eyes are on me, bemused as he holds a fist over his mouth but I see the corner of his mouth tugged upward.

I glare at him as I come out “Not a word.”

I take off my long boots and rid them of the slimy water, Luke wisely stays quiet as I rid myself of the slime as much as possible.

“Please tell me the sacred map shows a stream nearby,” I say to him

“Only a few miles away.”

I groan and hang my head, my shoulders sagging. I’m too tired to complain to fate right now.

“But there’s a small lake close,” Luke says, my head snaps up “If you’re willing to go.”

“I adore you at this moment,” I say as he takes my hand and starts forward

The stiffness of his shoulders doesn’t go unnoticed by me “At this moment?”

“Yes,” I say blatantly “Right now when I’m covered with slime and tired out of my sanity.”

The tree vines are as thick as before but that's not our only concern anymore.

"Are you kidding me?" I whine as I stare ahead

The thick, dark green vines that hang from towering trees are covered by big, cruelly curved thrones.

"Stay close," Luke says as we plunge in, the swift movements of his blade clearing a path for us

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The forest is darker here, trees twisted and hunched as if whispering am\*\*\* each other. The vines are so long, they cover the forest floor. With every slash of Luke's blade, a hiss reaches me, as if they can feel it.

Stop being irrational, I tell myself, but my hold on Luke's hand tightens. There are just a bunch of old trees, nothing to be afraid of.

I dare to close my eyes for one moment when I feel it, something slithering around my ankle.

I scream as I'm pulled back, my hand ripping out of Luke's. he whirls around and I'm hanging in the air, vines wrapping around my legs, my arms. My wide eye meets his and I see the hint of movement behind him.

"Watch out!"

Too late. They got him too.

I trash around wildly, the thorns dig into my skin, hot blood beads, and trickle down.

"What is happening?" I ask, breathless from my struggles and the tight hold on me

"I don't know," Luke grits out as the vines wrap around his wrists, his ankles, pulling at his limbs, slowly cruelly.

My breaths come up in short gasps as my eyes search around frantically. Then I do what comes to me instinctively.

I bite it.

Yes, I bite into that th\*\*\*\*, heavy tree limb and tear it off my right arm. The vine loosens its grip, hissing like a snake but it's enough for my slimy arm to slide away. I don't waste time before s\*\*\*\*ing and pulling at the vines on my other arm, slipping free.

“Whoa!” my vision lurches as I hang upside down

From my peripheral, I see Luke land on his feet, fingers extended to pointed claws but something shiny catches my eye.

The wild vines s\*\*\*\*\* me up again, but in one swift movement, I grab the dagger off the ground.

“I hate weeds,” I slash the blade through my binds and fall ungracefully on the ground

“Get up,” Luke is tugging at my arms, pulling me to my feet

Hissing like snakes, thrones gleaming like obsidian, the vines crawl towards us.

“Go, go!” Luke shoves me forward and I barely have time to register what’s happening when he’s taken the lead, hand clasped around my wrist like a manacle

“They’re too many!” I wave the dagger blindly, cutting and missing

“Keep moving!” Luke’s voice reaches my ears

He stops to an abrupt halt, I bump into his back and look around him to see what made him stop. Screams die at my tongue.

Bloody, mangled bodies are entrapped in the web of vines, dead eyes staring into nothing.

Something like a bullet goes past my arm, tearing the skin. I hiss, snapping out of my momentary trance. The bloody vines are slashing at us like throwing knives.

Luke hisses a curse, taking a sharp turn, the vines coming at us in a wild array, jabbing and puncturing. We try to

ward them off— me with the dagger and Luke with his free hand but that’s highly annoying while running.

I’m pretty sure we’re going to die from blood loss.

“I see a clearing,” Luke says, a silver of hope enters my heart

I see it too, the faint moonlight illuminates the patches of gra\*\*, the soon forsaken trees a respectable distance from each other.

We cross the forestry and into the clearing—

Something pulls me back. A scream escapes me as the vine curls around my arm, thrones digging painfully into my flesh. Luke snaps his head back, I see a flash of his clawed hand and the next instant, feel myself stumbling forward.

Breathing harshly, I stagger away from the cursed plants, the vines recoil, hissing venomously.

I harshly take off the dead vine curled around my arm, blood trickles down from the wounds.

Luke closes his eyes, breathing for a moment before coming to me.

“Come,” he tugs at my elbow “We need to clear and bandage the wounds.”

I nod, casting one last glance at the deadly trap we just left behind before we start forward.

Soon enough, I find myself cleaned up and changed into fresh clothes, my other pair still wet from washing and hanging off a tree.

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Sitting by a fire, arms and legs bandaged, body aching from exhaustion, my mind refuses to shut down.

As I stare at the flickering flames, my mind goes back to the bodies we just saw.

Those men... their families, their packs, they will never know what happened to them. Hell, they might not even get the bodies. They died in this very forest, by some accursed thing, afraid and struggling.

Something brushes against my shoulders. I snap out of my thoughts and look up, surprised as Luke settles beside me, the blanket dr\*\*\*d on my shoulders.

“You need to sleep, Hazel.” He says, stormy gaze trained on me

I turn my tired eyes to the fire again “I don’t feel sleepy.”

Seconds go by, maybe minutes and silence stretches around us, allowing my thoughts to chase each other in circles.

Something warm and callous touches my cheek. Startled, I jump away from the source.

Luke doesn’t seem fazed by my reaction. Instead, he leans forward, brushing his thumb across my cheek, it comes back wet with a transparent liquid.

My hand goes to my face, where a silent tear had trickled down.

“Why are you crying?” Luke asks, no emotion in his voice

“I didn’t know I was,” I say silently as I shift back to my previous position

“You’re upset about what we saw.”

It’s not a question, so I don’t bother with an answer but I can feel his intense gaze on me, urging me to say something.

“Those men,” breath catches in my throat, I curse mentally before swallowing “They’re just... gone.”

I turn my face to him, he’s staring at me with an impa\*\*ive face, not betraying a single thought.

“What’s done is done, Hazel.”

“But,” I can’t find the right words “But their families, their friends, all of them... this isn’t right.”

I purse my lips, hoping that he cannot see them trembling. I lower my eyes, hoping he can’t see them br\*\*\*\*\* with tears.

A beat of silence pa\*\*es.

Two arms pull me close to a warm chest, one of them wraps around my back, the other strokes my hair. I have to physically refrain myself from holding onto him like dear life.

“The world isn’t always right, Elise.” Luke’s voice caresses my ears “Those men knew that they might never come back from this Hunt.”

“It’s not fair to the people who loved them,” I whisper, closing my eyes, something wet and warm trickles down my cheeks “What about their mates? Their children? Was it their fault that this Hunt is a b\*\*\*\*\*?”

“No,” his callous fingers brush against my cheek, the action oddly comforting “but we cannot cage the ones we love,

just to keep them safe.”

I let out a shaky breath, out of their own volition, my arms snake around him, holding him tightly. I notice him tense, his hold on me tightens.

“It’s not fair.”



“Life is not fair.”

“I wish it was,” a child’s wish, a fruitless thought but alluring

“Many wish so,” Luke says, his heart beats a rhythm in my ears, calm, steady “But life is painful and unfair and so terrifying but we never want to let it go.”

Someone presses a kiss on my head. But it cant be Luke. Luke is a bada\*\*, he doesn’t do things like that.

“Life and pain go hand in hand, Hazel,” his voice is lulling me to sleep “And it is a place we cannot follow others, not even to help unless we want to drown ourselves.”

“Sounds like apathy,” I murmur, sleep closing in on me

He shakes with silent laughter, stroking my hair again “It’s bitter maturity, my little idealist.”

I mumble an unintelligible reply, my eyes shut firmly. In the warmth of his arms, hearing his heart beating a rhythm, I fall asleep.

## **Alpha's Hunt by Starlight Chapter 32**

Chapter 32 When I open my eyes

I’m awake but I can’t open my eyes.

It’s like they’ve been weighed down by a ton of sand, my insides are freezing and no matter how hard I clutch the blanket to myself, I’m still cold.

Finally, I manage to peel my eyes open. I’m aware of the tremble in my limbs as I push myself up. My tired eyes look around, searching for a specific block of granite when I see him walking towards the campsite.

“Morning,” I mumble, rubbing my eyes in hopes of being less tired “Where were you?”

“I went ahead to see if there’s any other surprise for us,” Luke says, eyeing me warily

I nod and do the best imitation of my usual self by quickly folding up the blanket and stuffing it in the bag.

I don’t want him to think I’m so shaken by that little episode last night.

My eyes flicker to Luke as I recall the events of yesterday.

Luke Winters comforted me.

And I let him.

I shake my throbbing head. Goddess, why did I have to do that? He's probably thinking I'm some emotional idiot. But in my defense, I didn't expect him to be paying attention to my mood! He should've just let me be!

But you can't deny he made you feel better.

Darn my inner voice! And darn my heart for beating so fast!

Luke busies himself with the map while I quickly put my hair in a braid. My head sways, my vision lurches, and here's a horrible throbbing in my head. I check my bandaged wounds but they don't hurt.

Except for the one of my shoulder which is radiating pain. Moon, it's unbearable.

"So, did you find anything?" I stand up, hoping Luke doesn't notice that I'm leaning against the tree

"No, the coast is clear." He says coolly, his eyes flicker to me as he folds up the map  
"We should get going."

My legs almost give up by just the mention of walking, but I nod. I can do this, a little weakness is nothing.

I pick up the bag and hand it to Luke. He's staring at me skeptically, his stormy eyes threatening to cut through me.

"What?" I roll my eyes

"Why won't you just admit it?" his eyes narrow a fraction

My heart skips a beat. Did he, is it that obvious? No. No, I'm fine!

"Admit that you're annoying as hell?" I put a hand on my hip "Fine, you are."

I walk past him but only a step further, I feel his hand close around my upper arm and pull me back. A hiss slips past my lips.

Luke's hand drops from my arm instantly. His eyes flicker from my arm to my probably pained expression and the next moment, he's pushed the sleeve of my shirt to my shoulder, inspecting the skin as if he expects to see what damage he's caused.

"Luke what are you—

My own eyes gravitate towards my arm and I see what he's seeing. Dark, cracked lines mar my pale skin, seeming to pulse from under the bandage on my arm

Our eyes meet for a second and then his hands are quick to remove the bandage, leaving a bruised puncture wound exposed. With gentles I didn't think him capable of, Luke's thumb brushes against the wound.

"Ouch!" I slap his hand away, cradling my arm, I give him a hard glare "It hurts!"

"Show me your arm," Luke said, his hard voice leaves no room for argument

I huff and toss my braided hair over my shoulder "I'm fine. Stop being such an over reactor."

His eyes narrow at my nonchalance as if tempted to throw his hands up in frustration. Instead, he says;

"Do you have nosophobia?"

"No." I deadpan

"Then just admit that you're sick," Luke says

"I am not," I say and turn around, already walking

No way in hell is I letting him have the chance to see me weaker than he already had. It's just a little pain, I can handle it. It's not like I'll die—

Someone s\*\*\*\*\*es my wrist and tugs me back so I stand just in front of a very pissed-off Alpha. Luke's eyes are fixed on me in a challenging glare, daring me to pull away.

"Then why is your heart beating so fast?" he asks, eyes narrowed at my wide ones

Why is it beating so fast? Because I'm sick! I am, I admit it! But no, it wasn't beating like this a while ago. What is wrong with it?

"I, umm," My eyes dart between both of his

We're standing so close, his body heat is reaching mine, warming every freezing bone in my body. His eyes are such a peculiar shade of blue, like a storm in the ocean, ready to devour everything in its wrath. Why am I suddenly considering drowning in them?

"Answer my question," Luke leans down, our distance reduces to almost nothing "Why is your heart beating so fast?"

Why the hell is this thing beating so fast? Am I having a heart attack? Why would I have a heart attack? My mind is s\*\*\*tering like sand and I blurt out the first thing that comes on my tongue.

“Because you’re making me nervous!”

He pulls back by sheer surprise “What?”

“You’re making me nervous, Winters!” I blurt out, growing more panicked by the second “Let go!”

Luke lets go of me and I put a hand on my chest, taking deep breaths “Moon, get a hold, will you? I’m a decent girl, not used to men holding me like that!”

Luke gives me an offended look as he crosses his arms, staring down at me.

“Then show me your wound like a decent girl, stop making a fuss about it.”

I narrow my eyes at him, but I can’t deny that he’s right. This wound looks bad, maybe it’s infected and I need to treat it somehow.

“Decency has its disadvantages,” I mutter under my breath as I hold out my arm

His fingers close around my skin carefully, his thumb brushes the wound again and I feel myself stiffen, jaw clenched. Luke focuses on the wound and applies the slightest pressure, something bulges up, crimson drops forming around it.

The thorn is still inside.

“How could you not notice this last night?” Luke flashes me a quick glare

“Well, I don’t know,” I glare at him with enough heat to melt iron “Maybe because I almost got killed and saw two corpses and my whole body was numb with pain!”

Luke opens his mouth to say something but then closes it again, taking a deep breath as if calming himself, he turns his eyes to my arm, crimson drops trailing down it.

“We need to pull it out,” He says

My eyes widen and I pull my arm away “That sounds like a horrible idea.”

Luke gives me an irritated look “Are you intending to keep it then?”

“Maybe it’ll become part of me?” I say unsurely

"This is the reason you're running a fever," Luke says, grabbing my elbow and leading me to a patch of grass to sit down "We need to get it out, you know it."

Too tired to argue anymore, I sigh "Fine. Do it while I don't have the strength to kick you for it."

Luke nods, I watch as his finger sharpens at the edges. His eyes find mine for a moment.

"On three."

I nod, Luke turns his focus on the wound again, the slight wood bugling up pinched between his pointed fingers like a pair of tweezers "One, two,"

Luke pulls it out and a flash of pain numbs my senses. I gasp, my eyes watering.

"Three," He pulls out the antiseptic from the bag and quickly cleans the wound, applies a bit of pressure with a wad of cotton to stop the bleeding, and quickly wraps a bandage around it

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"You liar," I say, a note of accusation in my voice, "You said on three!"

"I was expecting you to punch me on three."

"You've figured out my secrets, Winters," I say, cradling my freshly bandaged arm, my head swimming "Now I'll have to kill you."

"Good luck with that, Hazel," Luke said, getting to his feet, the long thorn still in his hand

I try to make my legs get up and succeed by clawing my hands against a tree and pulling myself up. I can see them trembling under me, my vision focuses in and out.

"Luke," a breath escapes my lips

That's when my legs decide it's a good time to quit, I sway back, eyes closed partially due to tiredness and partially to brace myself for the fall.

I don't fall.

Someone is holding me against something warm and since there's only one someone around me, I know who it is.

I lean my head against Luke's chest "I am ill."

And my vision goes black.

...

My tired eyes wake up to the sound of water.

Something cool and wet is pressed against my forehead and I know that's good. My body is burning on the outside but freezing inside. I clutch the blanket as tight as my numb hands allow.

A familiar, deep, and hard voice reaches me "You're awake."

My lips tug upwards "No s\*\*\*, Sherlock."

Luke takes off the cloth from my forehead and I realize he's missing a sleeve of his shirt. He dips it in something nearby and wrings out the extra water.

"How do you feel?" he asks, putting the cloth on my neck

"Exhausted," I exhale, Goddess, it's taking so much energy to speak

"That may have something to do with having a poisonous thorn in your flesh for a whole night."

I ignore the sarcasm in his voice "Where are we?"

"To the stream, I told you off yesterday," Luke says, helping me sit up

He goes through the bag and takes out a little bottle of golden fluid. Luke's warm hand slips behind my neck, holding the bottle to my lips.

"What is this?" I crinkle my nose at the horrible smell

"Antidote for poison," Luke says "And if you want to live, you'd better take it."

"Death doesn't look so bad," I murmur before taking a big gulp

I swallow, gasping as it leaving a burning trail in my throat, like too hot s\*\*\*e.

"How long until it works?" I ask, a little breathless

Luke's eyes flicker to me and I'd almost missed the look that crosses his face. A look that has me swallowing the fear bubbling inside and failing miserably.

He doesn't know.

"That depends on what type of poison that thorn had," Luke says, his voice cool as always "you should be alright in a few days."

My eyebrows go up. A few days? But we don't have time to waste!

"What about the Hunt?" I close my eyes, unable to keep them open

"Don't worry about it."

"How can I not?" A hint of irritation leaks in my voice "Both our lives depend on it."

"You don't need to remind me of that."

I open my eyes, the sun is almost down. How could I be sleeping for so long? Luke gathers firewood and starts a fire near the stream, the sounds of the forest reach my ears as I stare at the flickering flames.

Everything in me feels quiet, slowly shutting down. I swallow thickly as the image of those mangled bodies enters my head. Just what sort of poison is running in my veins?

"You should sleep, Hazel."

I look sideways at Luke, his stormy eyes are trained on me.

"I don't want to sleep." I bite down my bottom lip

I hear a shuffle as he moves, then someone catches my chin, my eyes fly to meet Luke's. his thumb gently frees my lip from my teeth, dark blue eyes trained on it. My heart is leaping and I don't think it's just because of the fever.

Then the spell is broken, Luke pulls away from me, his face impa\*\*ive.

"You need to sleep," He says "Your body needs to rest to recover."

With a sigh, I lay down, making my head comfortable on the bag. He's right, my body does need rest, but I can stop fear from coursing through me when I close my eyes.

"Luke," I say quietly, he hmms in response "When I open my eyes again, you'll be here, right?"

He doesn't respond. I have to refrain from dying from embarra\*\*ment. But I can't help the fear pulsing through me from the wound at my arm.

Someone tucks the blanket up to my chin, warm fingers brush against my jaw while doing so.

“When you open your eyes again,” a deep voice says “I will be here.”

✧ Luke’s POV ✧

I stare at the thorn in my hand. The inch-long piece of wood is curled cruelly at the end, like a barb.

A drop of black forms at the tip and drops on the ground. The gra\*\* burns where it falls.

It must be the work of a witch, there’s no way this could still leak poison after being detached for so long.

I’d taken as much medical supplies and weapons from the witch’s den as possible to carry. I hope that the antidote works better than this poison.

My eyes flicker to Hazel, curled up in the blanket. Her skin was scorching warm but the way her brows are furrowed tells me she’s cold.

For a moment, I’m tempted to do something about it. Surely, my warmth could make her feel better.

I shake my head, cutting off my thoughts. What the hell am I thinking? Hazel wouldn’t allow that.

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I’m a decent girl, not used to men holding me like that! She’d said this morning. Considering the look on her face, I wouldn’t doubt that.

It’s strange though. Someone with a personality and looks like hers could easily get any man she wanted.

Why would she waste her time with others when she only wants her mate?

Her devotion to an unknown man would be admired if it wasn’t so irritating. She doesn’t even know if she would ever meet him yet she’s ready to wait forever. I’ve never seen her look at a man in a way other women would.

She’s never looked at me that way.

I drag a hand down my face, scowling at my thoughts. What is wrong with you, Winters? Instead of gauging your options, you’re standing here, wanting to punch a man you don’t know?

Forcing myself to focus on more important matters, I calculate the days left, our rations, the distance left and take into consideration as many variables as I can without losing



my head. With Hazel unable to go on, for the time being, matters have complicated further.

Maybe I could carry her for the next few days? I know I can manage. Hazel didn't mind the ease last time.

A cough cuts through my thoughts.

I whirl around so fast, it takes a moment for my eyes to focus.

Hazel is sitting up, eyes wide and chest rising and falling rapidly as she stares at her hand. Her golden eyes settle on me as I near her.

"Hazel, what happened?" I ask, taking in her frantic expression

She doesn't say anything, simply turns her eyes to her palm again.

I follow her line of sight only to have my eyes widen. Drops of crimson stain her hand. Wide, golden eyes turn to me, fear swirling in them.

I force my limbs to move and reach around her to take the bag, I pull out the bottle of the antidote. Only one gulp is left in the little vessel.

Without a word, I hold it to her. Her hand is trembling when she takes it, I steady her hand with my own, lest she drops all the antidote on herself rather than drinking it.

A heavy silence descends on us, questions hang in the still air. Questions that I don't want to think about.

When I finally find my voice, it's only to say;

"Go to sleep, Hazel."

I get up, turn around ready to spend the next hour convincing myself that she's going to be fine. That the antidote will work. That her body will be strong enough to fight the poison.

A hand closes around mine.

"Am I going to die?"

I stand rooted to my place, not thinking, not breathing. Finally, my paralyzed limbs turn me around and I crouch down so we're on eye level.

"No," I say simply

She's the one who didn't want to be on this Hunt, she's the one who didn't know what to expect, she's the one who's poisoned. Yet she's the stronger one because she says what I can't;

"Maybe I am."

I punch my hand against the tree, shaking it to the roots. I let out the outraged growl trapped in my chest. I tell her never to say that again, that she's not going to leave me.

I do none of those things.

Because I have no rea\*\*urance to soothe her fears, no hope to give her, no solid fact to convince either myself or her that she's going to be fine.

Her small hand tightens around mine, burning with fever but her eyes are steady "That's possible, isn't it?"

"Come here," I gather her up in my arms, along with the blanket, and settle her on my lap

"What are you doing?" She asks, her shoulders tense

"You were cold," I say simply, wrapping my arms around her, holding her small frame close to myself

"I'm fine." She says, but her voice is wary, tired

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When I make no move to let go, she finally relents. Letting out a sigh, she leans against me and I don't bother to

quantize the relief that washes over me.

The silence is broken by a few more coughs. Her dainty hands fly to her mouth, my hold on her tightens abruptly.

Hazel pulls her hands away, smeared with crimson drops. She wipes them off on her clothes.

"Luke," her voice is so soft, so quiet

She looks up at me as if waiting for me to acknowledge the elephant in the room. The gloom hanging above our heads.

I stubbornly ignore it.

“Yes?” I brush my thumb across the corner of her mouth, wiping away a drop of blood

She lowers my hands, takes a shallow breath “If I die—

“You won’t,” my voice cuts through hers like a blade

“You don’t know that.” Her voice is calm, steady. Why is it making me want to break something?

She’s right. I don’t know. The possibility is staining her hands, burning her skin but I still cannot bring myself to admit it.

“Luke,” her hands are soft on my face, eyes steady “If I die, find a way back to me.”

“I won’t have to do that,” I shake my head “You’re not going to die.”

She smiles then, a little sad smile that makes my heart twist horribly in my chest, my throat is parched like sandpaper.

“But if I do,” she pulls me down and I let her, her forehead touches mine “Don’t leave me here. I don’t want to be buried in this rotten place.”

“Hazel, don’t—

“Tell my mom that I didn’t die a coward,” She tells me softly “Tell her I was brave and strong and amazing.”

Words are caught in the desert in my throat, unable to pa\*\*, my tongue is in the dust.

We’re so close to each other, I can see the faint freckles dusted across her cheeks, so close I can hear her heart beating in sync with mine, so close that if I move an inch, my lips would brush against hers.

“Will you do that for me?” She asks

Something in me snaps.

“No,” My voice is hard to even to my ears “I will not do any of that. I will not have to.”

She sighs, letting her hands drop “Luke, this isn’t—

“No,” I say firmly “Nothing is going to happen to you.”

She turns her face away, brows furrowed. I find myself wanting to make her believe me, to somehow rea\*\*ure her, to

keep my Hazel safe.

“Don’t you trust me?” I ask, pulling her closer to myself

“You know I do,” she says “But—

“Then trust me,” I press a soft kiss to her head, her brow, her temple “Nothing will happen to you, I promise.”

I tuck her head under my chin, her scent is so maddeningly strong, so close. It gives me an odd relief to hold her like this, a sense of belonging and no way in hell am I letting this go.

My heart jumps when she snuggles closer to my warmth “I hope you’re right.”

I hope so too, Elise. I close my eyes and press my face against her hair. I can’t lose you know.

## Alpha's Hunt by Starlight Chapter 33

Chapter 33 Sloth in a race

✧ Luke’s POV ✧

“Are you sure?” I ask her again

Hazel turns around, hands on her hips, and gives me a look, golden eyes gleaming with irritation.

“Luke, are you sure I was the one who fell ill?” she asks

“I don’t want to take any risk,” I can’t risk you

We’ve been bantering over this since morning. It took her another day to recover from that poison. Her fever is gone,

the bruise on her wound is almost gone too and her steady heartbeat tells me she’s fine now.

I know that we have to move on, I know that our time is limited but I don’t want her to strain herself.

“I’m perfectly fine!” Hazel says, tossing her golden-brown hair over her shoulder “What do you think I am? A damsel in distress?”

“Then don’t complain later,” I say as I pick up the bag

“Finally!” she grins “Let’s go and win!”

With a quirk of my lips, I take her hand in mine and start forward, careful to let my pace be slow at the start. We can go faster gradually.

Her hand is so small in mine but fits perfectly. A tingly feeling rises my arm and I wonder if she could feel it too if she could see what I had started to see us as. I glance at Hazel from the corner of my eyes.

Bound by habit, my eyes take in the detail of her. the shades of golden and brown in her hair, the perfect arch of her brows, her wide hazel eyes that look like pools of gold, the careful incline of her nose, the pouty shape of her lips.

I always knew she was beautiful, but with the way she acts most of the time, I was fairly sure she’s just a childish, fragile girl.

But Hazel did what no other woman has ever managed to do.

She surprised me.

With resilience, bravery, wit, and more hope and contentment than anyone, I’ve seen. She surprised me with her depth, and if I could, I would take every moment of my day asking her about the way she saw the world.

‘Maybe I’d find someone else.’ She had said that night so long ago

Maybe I already have. I tighten my hold on her hand and increase my speed slightly.

Not finding your mate isn’t rare. As the law states, unmated Lycantroups can get married to another at the age of 20 but even though the ceremony around full moon night and the two people mark each other, creating a pseudo-mate bond, if the real soulmate of either of the partners encounters them, that bond is stronger. It usually leads to pretty unhappy relationships, if not resisted vehemently.

But it just might work. A lot of couples live their entire lives without encountering their true mates.

Since I don’t have my dose of wolfsbane, my senses are more active than I’d like. Not a mile later, I take in the shuffle of feet. My muscles tense, my body already preparing itself for action.

“Luke?” Hazel gives me a confused look

“Someone’s coming,” I pull my gun out, she does the same “Stay close.”

Hazel nods “How many?”

I focus and my senses pinpoint the sound coming from just ahead of us. A singular heartbeat. Some of the tension in

my shoulders go out.

“Just one,” I say

“One?” I can hear the sus\*\*\*ion in her voice “Wait, is it—

Pop! Pop! Pop!

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Confetti falls over us and soon enough a familiar face comes into my view, wearing a familiar suit.

“Ah, Alpha Winters.” The man smiles pleasantly “The first one the reach this checkpoint. Congrats!”

I hold back a growl. What monopoly is this? Why is the Alpha Supreme being so considerate? Or is he just keeping eyes on us?

“Another break?” I can’t hide my disdain

The man looks a little reluctant when he sees my expression but clears his throat “Yes, Alpha. If you will please, follow me.”

I glance at Hazel, she looks as irritated as I, if not more. The events of the last lodge replay in my head, I refrain from clenching my jaw.

Grow a\*\* lustful Alphas to trail behind her again. Perfect.

But when she meets my eyes, a smile tugs at her lips, her eyes glint with mischief.

“Last one there is a puppy,”

And she’s gone.

I roll my eyes despite my smile. Didn’t I tell her she’s not the hunting type?

I let instinct take over and my feet automatically guide me towards her, trailing after our messenger. The next moment, my arms wrap around her and a surprised squeal reaches my ears as I lift her to the ground.

“Got you,” I say in her ear

"You cheated!" Hazel looks back at me, eyes narrowed "There was no deal about catching me. It was a race!"

"I still won."

I put her to her feet and Hazel huffs, crossing her arms across her chest.

"No you didn't," she says

I open my mouth to say something but a cough interrupts me. Both of us turn our eyes to our messenger, who's standing a little ahead, a small smile on his face.

"We're almost here," he says

We walk a little further and I catch a glimpse of a tower. I blink and squint my eyes to see through the thick trees and my vision remains the same. A tower made of big blocks of granite, vines climbing over it. We reach a clearing and my eyes widen at the sight before me.

A sky-scraper castle stands before us, four towers stand at its corners, wild vines climbing over them in ragged lines. The front gates are made of the darkest wood, with heavy brass bolts. I catch a glimpse of narrow windows with tinted glass on the inner castle.

"Are you guys—" Hazel looks at me and our messenger "Can you see this castle? Or is it just me?"

"Yes, of course," our messenger nods "All for a little fun. One day and one night in a fairytale castle."

I raise a skeptical eyebrow, my expression as enthusiastic as a sloth put in a race.

He offers me an apologetic smile "All on Alpha Supreme's command, Alpha. Please, come this way."

At the same moment, two women walk over to us. They glance at me for one moment before their eyes settle on Hazel.

"Poor dear!" the older woman takes Hazel's hands in her own "You look exhausted! Come along, we'll get you

patched up."

"Umm, I," Hazel looks at me, confusion etched on her face

I put my hands on her shoulders and pull her back, protectiveness took over my head. She's just recovered from the

moon knows what, I'm not letting her go out of my sight.

"Let the lady go with them, Alpha." Our messenger says "She's going to be alright, I assure you."

I narrow my eyes at him, he takes an unsure step back, before I have the chance to say anything a soft hand falls over mine.

## ADVERTISEMENT

"I'll be fine," Hazel says with a small smile "I'm a tough girl, Winters."

I take into consideration our situation. Even if I want to stay with her, I'm not in the power to argue right now. And if this is another break, it's neutral territory, they have no reason to bother us.

At least it seems so.

I let out a breath and turn my gaze to the two women in front of us, making sure to put every bit of intensity in my gaze.

"I expect to see her in one hour, perfectly intact," I say, an unsaid warning in my voice

With that, I pull my hands away from her shoulders and step back. Hazel gives me an exasperated glance, the other two women exchange a nervous look.

"Come on," the younger woman, just a girl really, takes Hazel by the arm "We don't have much time."

## Elise's POV

I sigh in pure bliss and sink deeper into the bubble bath.

Do you know that embarrassing dream of being a princess when you were a little girl? Yeah, I'm living the dream.

Another knock sounds on the door, followed by a panicked voice;

"Elise, hurry up! It's been almost forty minutes since you went in there!" Clary, the girl who got me in this tower, says

I pout but then I decide to get out after all. I quickly dry myself and put on my clothes, my hair wrapped in a towel.



“Sorry,” I give her an apologetic smile as I come out “It’s been so long since I took a bath like that.”

“No time to waste,” she hurriedly pulls me towards the huge four-poster bed “Gosh, that brute of your partner is probably planning on h\*\*\*\*\* me.”

I laugh at her panicked expression “Luke is just a little protective. He won’t do anything like that, trust me.”

“Well, you had your back to him when he was staring at me and Aunt Helda with murderous eyes,” Clary says as she picks up a dress from the bed

They were the Omegas from the Alpha Supreme’s pack and they’d been sent here to take care of the compet\*\*ors.

When I told her I’m an Omega too, she pretty much blew up in a rainbow from the happiness that an Omega is in the leading team of this Hunt.

“I’m sure you’re going to need help in putting this on,” she holds up something that can only be described as a duchess’ ballgown

My fingers skim the soft golden material and I’m amazed at the softness, the intricate designs on the dress, and the layers of cloth.

“Yeah, no way in hell am I wearing this.” I say “I’m probably going to trip and crack my head open. And ruin the dress, might I add.”

“Oh nonsense,” Clary waves a hand “You’ll look amazing. Besides, it’s necessary for the occasion.”

So grumbling and complaining, she puts me in the dress and sits me in front of the dresser, drying my hair before

starting to put it in a complicated hairstyle.

“Goddess, we are so late!” Clary says, fussing over makeup

“Calm down,” I chuckle “Luke wouldn’t—

The door slams open, almost breaking off its hinges. Clary jumps away with a squeal of fright, my instinct tells me to reach for my gun but then I realize this is neutral territory and they had taken it.

A tall figure strides in, a squeaking Helda behind him. Luke’s dark blue eyes take in the room with one glance before they settle on me. Something similar to relief cross his

face. The next moment, he's crossed the room, standing only a few steps away from me.

"I told you, Alpha," Helda squeaks out, trying and failing to look intimidating "She's getting ready!"

Luke's eyes stop searching my face for signs of worry or injury and take in my dressing, his eyebrows shoot up to his hairline.

My own eyes take in his attire. Dressed like some old-timey Duke, with all the elaborate coats and the frilly dress shirt he looks so, so—

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I break in a fit of giggles "You look ridiculous."

Luke scowls at me, then looks down at his clothes self-consciously.

"I think I look fine," he says "Handsome, even."

Still chuckling I close the remaining distance between us. His hair has been brushed neatly back, a single strand of wavy hair is out of place.

Mindlessly, I raise my hand and put it back in place.

"Don't be so disappointed," I grin at him "At least you made me laugh for once."

Clary snickers from her place by the dresser, Luke casts her a quick glare before he turns his gaze to me again. He straightens his posture, features calm and composed.

"I'm waiting in the sitting room down the hall," he says "Don't take long."

With that, he turns around and leaves the room.

"My moon," Helda sighs "That's one bossy Lycan."

Cary grins at me as I sit back down in front of the dresser, I raise an eyebrow.

"What?"

"That was quite the entrance he made," she says, waggling her brows "He seems very worried about your safety."

"Of course," I say "We've been through a rough time, you never know what to expect on this Hunt."

“Not that kind of worried, idiot.” She rolls her eyes “Didn’t you notice the way he was looking at you?”

“Like I’m his partner?” I offer

Clary’s facepalms herself “How have you been surviving this Hunt, you dingdong?”

“Hey,” I make a face

“I have to admit,” Helda says, walking over to me with an old-timey hand fan “Alpha Winters must care about you.”

Unbidden, heat rushes to my face along with Luke’s words.

Nothing is going to happen to you, I promise.

I don’t remember much of that night, only muddled words in a haze of pain. But I do remember the look on Luke’s

face when I told him I think I’m going to die.

The way he looked at me then is burned in my memory. Like he would drag me back from hell if he has to, but he won’t let me go.

I shake my head “Well, he does. I’ve been bearing him for over a month.”

Finally, I manage to get them off my case and once they’re done with dressing me up as if I’m an actress in a film, Clary points out where the sitting room is.

I open the huge ebony doors, the fan held in front of my face like a perfect duchess. My eyes instantly find Luke, standing by the window, the wind lifting his hair.

His dark, stormy gaze snaps to me, I grin widely, feeling too excited for this break of ours. I already like it better than the last.

I gather up my huge puffy dress and walk over to him, only then do I realize there’s a door on the other side of the room as well.

It opens and my grins fall, my eyes widen and the fan slips down from my hand. I stare at the man standing just behind Luke, his clothes red from blood, another man helping him inside.

“Ethan?”

## **Alpha's Hunt by Starlight Chapter 34**

## Chapter 34 Not like others

"I'm fine," Ethan says

He's lying on the sofa, arm wrapped in a bandage, and changed out of the blood-drenched clothes into loose, frilly dress shirt and trousers. The worst of his injuries have already been treated by a witch who's staying here on the

Alpha's Supreme's instructions.

"For the last time," I give him a look "How did this happen?"

Ethan drags a hand down his face "Another team tried to ambush us."

I nod, feeling absurd that I'm not surprised. Well, what can I say? Anything is possible in this bloody game.

"We barely overpowered them," Tyler shakes his head

"Reaching the checkpoint must've been perfect timing then," Luke eyes Ethan's bandaged arm

Ethan huffs out a laugh, either ignoring Luke's ruthless gaze or not caring about it "A miracle."

"Not so much when you have to dress like a lunatic." Tyler tugs at his clothes moodily

My eyes stay on Ethan, worry tugs at my heart. He's always been so good to me, I can't help but feel my heart soften for him.

Unthinking, I gently put my hand on his arm "Does it still hurt?"

Ethan's eyes slide to mine, he smiles his usual polite smile "You offend me. I'm an Alpha, Elise. I can handle a little pain."

He stole my line. I smile.

"Alright then," I stand up and fix my clothes "Time for me to explore this place. See you later?"

"I look forward to it," Ethan nods

Something warm closes around my hand, causing tingles to spread over my skin. My head snaps to Luke as he puts my hand on his arm.

"I'm coming with you," he says

I try to stop my heart from beating so fast. It doesn't slow down, the darn thing!

"Okay," I say, breathless for some reason

What the hell, Elise?! Get a grip! There must be a reason behind this, something related to the Hunt. Maybe Luke wants to see if it's safe? Yup. That must be it. It has nothing to do with you.

Luke guides me out of the sitting room and through the wide hallways, the high walls adorned with portraits and coats of arms.

"Where are we going?" I ask "And how do you even know where to go?"

"While you were busy dressing up, I took a round of this tower." Luke says as we go down the stairs "It's secure for the time being, at least."

I glance at the guards standing by the doors of the tower, two bulky men with guns hanging at their belts. If they want to, they can easily take us down since we don't have weapons.

"And where are we going?" I ask since Luke doesn't go to that door but turns into another hallway

"To the main castle grounds," he says "The tower is where we will be staying, but I want to analyze the whole place."

I nod, taking in every wall and door we pass by. Through the endless maze of hallways, corridors, and rooms, we reach a place I could've never expected.

In the innermost part of the castle, a huge garden greets us. Rows and rows of flowers are scattered in a million colors and shapes.

"Oh my moon," I hurriedly descend the steps that lead to it, almost tripping due to my dress "This is amazing!"

Everywhere I look, a new kind of beauty enters my vision. Roses standing proud and magnificent, bluebells hanging

their heads as if listening to a distant melody, gardenias little and shy and my utmost favorite, sunflowers following the sun.

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Okay, maybe I have a flower fetish.

In dreamy tranquility, I go from one bed to the next then stop by the roses and take a deep, deep breath. A smile tugs at my lips.

"You like this, don't you?" I turn around to see Luke just a few steps behind me

"I love it!" I say with a bright grin

Luke raises an eyebrow "Never took you to be into flowers, Hazel."

"What do you mean by that?" I give him a look "Isn't it obvious that girls like flowers?"

"Not when it comes to you."

"Excuse me?"

"You don't share a lot of similarities with other girls, Hazel."

Luke surprises me as he reaches over to the sunflower bed and moves his hand to pluck one.

"No, don't!" I grab his arm and pull back

"Why?" Luke asks, surprised "Don't you like them?"

"No," I say with a shake of my head "I love them. If you pluck it, it's going to wither away."

Luke's stormy eyes stay on me as if reading a book in another language. Then his lips tug upwards and his shoulders shake with a silent chuckle.

My eyes widen and my heart squirms in place when he leans down to press a kiss on my head, his hand slips into mine, fingers interlocked.

"Not like others." Luke says, laughter in his voice

The next moment, we're walking again, my hand still held in his.

"We need to finish this tour before another team arrives or they call us back to our rooms," Luke says, his voice cool and composed as ever

I shake my head and try to get rid of the b\*\*\*erflies in my stomach.

Goddess, this man is weird.

...

Two more teams arrive and soon night falls. Only the serious people make it so far because the other two duos don't bother getting to know anyone else. Dinner is served at a long table, fancy as if it took them two

days to make it.

We retire to our rooms for the night, Luke's room is just beside mine. I change out of my clothes with a bit of difficulty

and grab a loose nightdress that, thankfully, isn't pooling at my feet.

With a sigh of relief, I slid into bed and soon, darkness gathers me up in its arms and cradles me to sleep.

Crick, crick!

I furrow my brows and pull my blanket higher, trying to ignore the sound. It comes again, disturbing the lovely dreamless sleep of mine. What is this sound anyways?

I open my eyes and groggily sit up. my eyes swim over the room and then they stop. I stare wide-eyed and terrified as the doorknob rattles again.

My gun. My hand falls to my hip, where I usually have it in my pocket but I only feel the soft material of the nightdress. Oh crap.

I spring up from my bed to the furthest corner of the room. The door cracks open and I do what comes to me instinctively.

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I scream.

Like a banshee, like a crazy lady, like an annoying kid who didn't get their favorite ice cream.

The intruder stumbles back as I throw a vase towards him. It misses and crashes against the door frame. I pick up a second vase and throw it, just for good measure.

The door is thrown open then, I inch towards the pointed fire poker near the grate. In the dark of my room, I see a tall silhouette move forward and without thinking twice, I bring the poker up against his throat.

"Move one inch," I marvel at the steadiness of my voice "And I won't hesitate before making a hole in your throat."

"I had no idea," A deep, hard, oddly familiar voice says "You felt so strongly about me."

The next moment, Luke plucks the fire poker from my hand and carelessly tosses it aside.

“Why were you screaming?” he studies my face “What happened?”

“There was someone outside my door,” I say, trying to wrap my head around what just happened

“What?” A new voice says

I look at the door again, my eyes now accustomed to the dark, see Ethan and Tyler, their bed hair sticking in all directions. Behind them, I catch a glance of our messenger, Mr. Stone, as he had told his name earlier.

“Someone was at the door, they opened the door and woke me from my beauty sleep,” I say, my voice calmer than what I feel “And I guess I woke all of you up.”

“But Ms. Attwood, are you sure?” Mr. Stone asks

“Now that you’ve said it, maybe I just imagined the door opening,” I say, sarcasm dripping from my voice “And those vases were kind of ugly so I thought I might as well get rid of them.”

“But why would anyone come here?” Ethan mutters, eyeing the door, then he turns to me “Did you have the door locked?”

I hesitate before shaking my head.

“Seriously, Hazel?” Luke gives me a disappointed look, I shrug sheepishly

I was so tired after dinner, I simply changed and fell on the bed like a corpse. Goddess, that was a big slip on my part.

If the door wasn’t so old and hard to open, I probably wouldn’t even notice.

“But there’s not a hint of another scent here,” Tyler points out

“Whoever it was, must’ve masked their scent,” Ethan says, my stomach twists into a horrible knot

No, no. Don’t overthink, who knows maybe it was... room service?

“Can we sort this out in the morning?” I say, then yawn before I continue “I want to sleep again.”

“You’re right,” Ethan sighs “Make sure to lock the door.”



Everyone loves to go out but Luke stays in his place, looking around the room with skeptical eyes.

“Umm, Luke?” I say “Shouldn’t you get going?”

Luke turns to look at me, his face set in stone with determination “I’m staying.”

The other three men stop in their tracks and turn to look at him, no expression crosses Luke’s face.

“But, Alpha Winters,” Mr. Stone says “You can’t just—

Mr. Stone cuts himself off when Luke is towering over him the next moment, eyes narrowed a fraction.

“If you cannot guarantee her safety, I will just have to do it myself.” Luke says, every word thick with determination “Is

that a problem?”

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“I, err,” Mr. Stone’s eyes dart around the room “Alright.”

I watch Ethan glance warily at Luke, his jaw clenched just a bit but he says nothing about it.

“Good night,” He says to me “And stay safe.”

He catches Luke’s eyes and I see a steely look on Ethan’s face that I’ve never seen before. He goes out of the room,

Tyler follows behind and so does Mr. Stone.

Luke bolts the door and when he turns to me again, I cross my arms.

“You didn’t ask for my permission to stay here,” I say

“Why should I ask when I can just do as I please?”

I huff, what an arrogant idiot “I can just kick you out.”

Luke doesn’t answer me as he picks up the extra pillows and the cushions on the settee to divide the bed into two halves.

We settle down, and the silent night goes on. Now and then, my eyes start to drop but then they unintentionally swim to the door.

Come on! I tell my brain. It's bolted, calm down, will you?

But my head refuses to let down its guard and I have to deal with being sleepy as hell but not being able to fall asleep.

"You're still awake."

I almost jump when the familiar, deep voice reaches me. I turn my face to Luke, he's lying still on the other side of the bed, so still, I'd almost forgotten he was there. He has his face to the ceiling, his eyes closed.

"So are you," I say, my voice quiet in the silence around us

Luke turns his face to me, hooded blue eyes dark "I can hear your heartbeat slow down to normal and then suddenly speed up again. It's not the best sound to fall asleep to."

My eyes widen "Really?"

He nods, his gaze penetrating through me. I fiddle with the covers, words jumble in my head. Damn his too accurate senses.

"I can't sleep." I whisper

I expect Luke to scoff and tell me to somehow regulate my heartbeat so he can sleep, give a demeaning comment about Omegas, or flat out laugh at me.

But he does none of that. He just stays quiet.

Then; "Come here."

My eyes snap towards him, he's extended his arm in my direction, his face unreadable.

There's a beat of silence, then my hands develop a brain of their own and push away the cushions to crawl over to him.

Luke's arm wraps around me, holding me so my head falls on his chest, his warmth radiates to me, the steady beat of his heart a rhythm, the scent of pine trees and coffee oddly comforting.

"As long as I'm here," Luke's voice caresses my ears "No one can lay a single finger on you."

My eyes fall shut, the tension in my shoulders goes away and I feel myself drifting into a peaceful sleep.

I didn't mean to say it, I didn't even know I meant it, but the words simply tumble out of my mouth without permission.

"I know."

...

## Alpha's Hunt by Starlight Chapter 35

Chapter 35 My dearest moralist

I wake up in a soft bed, huddled in the covers, I can feel the gentle warmth of sunlight coming from the gap in the

window curtains.

I sigh in comfort and make myself easy against this stiff pillow, the blanket absurdly heavy around my waist.

Wait, what?

My eyes open and I almost scream my lungs out when I see the living being next to me.

Holy mother of ducks! What in the bloody hell—

My eyes travel up and find a familiar face.

Oh.

My shoulders relax and I let out a breath of relief, the events of last night come back to me.

Curiously, I watch his face perfectly relaxed. His features slack of the usual rigidity, lips slightly parted and hair falling into his eyes. He looks almost cute. Strange as it is, I've never seen Luke relax. Not even once. Not even during the times, I was keeping watch and he was sleeping.

A small smile tugs at my lips. Luke may complain all he wants about these breaks but he sure is enjoying his sleep.

It'll do him good, to take it a little easy.

How can he take it easy when his life literally depends on winning this Hunt?

Without wanting to, my mind wanders to how Luke must've dealt with all this since the age of 11, just a child, being told that he might become a monster.

I sigh. It's too early for thoughts like this. Unthinking, I move my hand to brush away the hair falling in his eyes. I hold back a squeal, I do need to ask him what he uses to keep it so soft.

The next moment all my thoughts go out of the window when his hold on me tightens abruptly, his eyes snap open, pupils dilated to tell me he's gone into survival mode.

I slowly retreat my hand with an apologetic smile. Luke lets out a breath, the tension in his frame leaves, and his eyes

fall shut again.

"Sorry," I say softly "I didn't mean to wake you."

Luke gives the barest shake of his head "Don't apologize,"

I furrow my brows in confusion "I didn't wake you?"

"You did,"

Surprisingly, he offers me a sleepy smile, eyes open just enough to give a glance of the darkest blue.

"But you never have to apologize to me," Luke says

A small chuckle leaves my mouth "Even when I annoy you with all my rambling?"

His smile deepens "Especially then."

"Don't back out later," I grin

Luke brushes his knuckles across my cheek, making my heart skid to a halt "I'm a man of my words."

The door knocks, I jump ten meters away from Luke— and right off the bed.

"Ouch!"

I get up, rubbing my aching behind. Luke throws me a faint, amused smile before moving to the door. When he swings it open, I see the permanent tension slam right back in his frame.

Furrowing my brows, I go over and peek from behind him. Familiar crystal blue eyes meet mine my own.

“Good morning,” Ethan gives me a smile

“Morning,” I smile back “Is everything okay?”

“That’s what I wanted to ask,” Ethan’s gaze flickers to Luke for one quick moment, but Luke notices it, he notices alright

“You don’t have to worry about her, Parks.” Luke says, every word low, hard, precise “I am here for that.”

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Ethan holds his stormy gaze, his own steely.

“That is exactly what I’m worried about, Winters.”

I can almost feel the air charged with tension. My eyes flicker between them, unsure of what to do. Think Elise!

Before they pounce to kill each other.

“Everything’s okay, Ethan.” I bring with a smile and a cheery tone “Luke was kind enough to keep my company for the night.”

Ethan gives me a slow nod, but his unwavering gaze stays on Luke. Crap!

“Umm, Luke, why don’t you leave for your room?” I say, trying to unfurl his fisted hand “I’d like to get dressed for the day.”

Luke keeps his stormy gaze on Ethan, then he takes a breath, his fist unfurls and he turns to look at me.

“Take your time,” Luke says, giving my hand a momentary squeeze before he goes out of the door

But of course, Alphas have to act like Alphas and he bumps his shoulder against Ethan’s on his way out. Ethan’s jaw clenches, but he keeps a hold on himself.

“Did anyone come again?” he asks me, fairly calm now

“No,” I shake my head “everything was fine.”

I keep my gaze on him for a few moments, telling myself I should not say what I what to say but I still do;

“Ethan, as much as I appreciate your concern for me,” I say, choosing my words “I’ve been staying with Luke for over a month, he’s the safest person for me to be around.”

Ethan seems taken aback by my words. He blinks, hesitates for a moment, then shakes his head.

“I understand,” He says “It’s just, a lot of rumors surround your partner. It’s hard to ignore them all.”

Curiosity tugs at my head, but I hold it back.

“It’s okay,” I say “I’ll see you around?”

Ethan gives me his usual composed smile “Until then.”

I close my door and lean against it with a breath of relief. Elise: one, immature Alphas: zero.

Whistling, I pull the curtains aside, make my bed and take a long shower.

When I come out of the bathroom, I see Clary already waiting to help me dress up for the day. I fiddle with the material of my dark blue gown while she fusses over my hair.

Should I ask her about the incident last night?

“Goddess, this isn’t the one either,” Clary says, comparing two necklaces

With an internal sigh, I realize I cant trust her with this kind of questioning. So I put the brooding aside and pay attention to her irritated expression.

“Why are you so worried?” I say as I take one of the two chains she was holding, I put it around my neck and smile at my reflection “It’s just jewelry. Not like it matters so much.”

“Of course it does!” She says “There’s a party this evening!”

I raise an eyebrow “Party?”

Clary nods enthusiastically “Yeah, my whole pack will be there and so will all of you guys. It’ll be awesome!”

I nod at her, feeling excited by just the mention of a party. Well, I haven’t been to a lot of parties, but as long as this offers good food, I’m up for it.

Once dressed up, I go to Luke's room. I knock once, twice. He doesn't answer. I cack open the door and peck inside.

His room is pretty much like mine but he's not here. Furrowing my brows, I step away and close the door. Where could he be?

"You seem lost."

I look sideways to come face to face with Ethan, he offers me a greeting smile.

"No, just looking around." I say

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"Mind if I join you?" He asks

"Not at all," I take the arm he offers me and we start walking

"I guess you heard of the party in the evening," Ethan says, taking in my dressing in a glance

"I'm guessing you did as well," I say

Honestly, this type of clothing suits him. with his golden hair and crystal blue eyes, Ethan does look like some Duke.

I cant help but chuckle at the thought.

"What?" he asks me

"Nothing," I shake my head with a smile "You just seem perfect for a play like this."

"Your prince in shining armor?"

"A rakish Duke."

Ethan laughs, his eyes shine with amus\*\*\*\*t "I'm jealous of Luke. You must make for a very lively companion."

"That I am," I grin brightly

I didn't realize when I took Ethan to the gardens but, well, I won't complain. I can spend my whole day here. We walk around, telling stories of incidents on this Hunt when he brings up something I wish he hadn't.

“At the other lodge,” Ethan says, his tone careful, “You said we can’t know each other after the Hunt.

What did you mean by that?”

I stay quiet for a moment, keeping my eyes on the rows of tulips in front of me. I’m not ashamed of what I did, I

never will be. But I still haven’t prepared myself for everyone’s reactions when the news leaks out. Things like this never stay hidden.

Then why bother hiding them anyway?

“You know my pack didn’t want me to be Luke’s partner?” I say, he nods “Well, I didn’t want to be his partner either.”

“Of course, that’s reasonable—

“No,” I cut him off calmly “I didn’t want to go with him for nothing.”

“What?” Ethan furrows his brows

“I… got a contract,” I pause, shrug “It says that if Luke wins this Hunt, the pack will let me and my mom go free without severing our connect.”

Silence descends on us, I brace myself for the judgment that’s about to come. The judgment that will come again and again in the future.

Before Ethan could say anything, I turn around and give him a small smile.

“I guess I ruined your impression of myself.”

“I, I don’t know what to say.” Ethan says, his features slack

“Maybe that’s for the best,” I continue “Not saying anything. I don’t know what you might be thinking about me, but

I’m done waiting for someone to come and save me from lifetime slavery.”

I turn around and halt in my steps. A few yards away, at the top of the stairs leading to the garden is standing a tall, austere figure, eating me up with his stormy blue gaze.

“Done gallivanting around, Hazel?” Luke asks as I stop just in front of him, an edge to his voice

I raise an eyebrow “What crawled up your behind?”



Luke looks at someone behind me, his eyes flash dangerously and I realize just who he's looking at. Then he takes me by the arm and taking fast steps, leading me somewhere in the maze of hallways.

"Luke, what is wrong with you?" I say as I pull my arm away from him

"There's nothing wrong with me," Luke snaps "What is wrong with you? He's our competitor, not a suitor trying to

woo, you."

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"Ethan is my friend," I narrow my eyes "And I have no idea why you act like a total asshole when he's around."

"I do no such thing."

"Really?" I scoff and cross my arms "Maybe you should take your time and think about it."

I turn around, ready to go and eat something to cheer myself up. Alphas. They are beyond me.

"Don't you want to know who it was last night?"

That secures my interest, I halt in my steps and look over my shoulder "Did you find anything?"

"No," Luke crosses his arms "But we did lose something."

"What?" I turn to face him again

"The map."

My eyes widen "You mean..."

He gives me a curt nod "While we were in your room last night, someone took that map from my room. Maybe that

was the plot all along."

"Oh my moon, we should tell Mr. Stone." I say "He can tell the Alpha Supreme—

"No."

“Why the hell not?” I blink

“We have no proof that someone took it,” Luke says “And I don’t want to expose our vulnerability to anyone just yet.”

“Then what?”

“What were you talking to Parks about?”

“Seriously?” I give him a look “I know you don’t like Ethan but this is too much.”

Luke gives me an offended glance “I told you I don’t care about anything related to him. Did he tell if they still have their map?”

“We didn’t talk about maps.”

“Then do,” Luke says, I wonder if I’m imagining the hardness in his voice “Do that thing you do when you talk too smoothly and get out valuable information.”

I cross my arms “And if they still have their map?”

“Then our criminal tendencies will have to do.”

“You will steal it?” My mouth hangs open

“No.”

I let out a breath of relief.

“It might as well be you.”

I stomp on his foot. Luke shows no hint of pain except for the momentary closing of his eyes.

“If you don’t remember, my dearest moralist,” Luke says tautly “Winning this Hunt is what’s getting you freedom and my peace. Without a map, we should kiss them goodbye.”

I worry my bottom lip, my brain running a thousand miles per second. I cannot believe I’m using my awesome mind for something like this but...

I didn’t come this far for anything.

Finally, I say “I have a better idea.