

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 trunk 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 pa**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 draped 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 impassive 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 impassive.

“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 hums in response “When I open my eyes again, you’ll be here, right?”

He doesn’t respond. I have to refrain from dying from embarrassment. 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 braided bolts. I catch a glimpse of narrow windows with tainted 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 a**ure 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.

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“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 embarra**ing 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.”

Gary 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 grantee 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.”

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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 begin 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 a**hole 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.

Alpha’s Hunt by Starlight Chapter 36

Chapter 36 What we always do

“You made all this for us?”

The dining table is laden with food. The plates set and chairs set. Mac n’
cheese, sandwiches, tea and coffee, omelets,

fruit salad and pancakes.

“Of course,” I smile brightly “We deserve a little appreciation for coming
all this way, don’t we?”

Alpha Hugo and his beta, Johnathan exchange a look before the Alpha
smiles at me.

“You’re right, Milady,” he says, then pulls out a chair for me “But you
must join us.”

I hold back a relieved sigh at his compliance.

“Why not?” I smile and I sit down. I glance around the table “Everyone? Should we start?”

Ethan sits down across me, Tyler seats himself as well. Alpha Brennan and his companion, Warrior Isaac also join us.

The lunch goes smooth as b***er until someone decides to be smart.

“Where is Alpha Luke?” Alpha Hugo asks

Thank universe I planned this. With a sigh, I lean back in my chair, a gla** of juice held in my hand as

though it’s wine.

“Luke and I,” my eyes flicker to Ethan for a moment “We argued. He was being difficult for no reason.”

Alpha Hugo keeps looking at me for a moment, then at Ethan before saying “I see.”

The poor soul, he’s probably thinking our team coordination isn’t strong. Well... it’s not exactly a lie but when both of us want to win so badly, we can put our differences aside.

After lunch, Ethan accompanies me back to my room, awkward silence stretches between us until we reach the door of my room.

“Elise,” my hand stops at the handle

I turn to look at Ethan again, he’s staring straight at me, a determined gleam in his eyes.

“Just so you know,” he says, without breaking the eye contact, takes my hand in his, giving it a gentle squeeze, “I

think you did the right thing. You stood up for yourself against all those higher ranks.”

He cups the side of my face and I blush like an idiot. Ethan’s features soften in a smile, his eyes clear as the sky.

“I admire you,” he says softly

“Heart-touching.”

I jump away from Ethan, face burning from embarrass**ment.

Luke’s unimpressed, slightly pissed face enters my vision. He’s standing with his hands behind his back, towering over Etan by a good few inches, looking like some military general staring at a bug under his shoe.

“But I’m afraid you will have to put a leash on your feelings, Parks.” He says coldly “I have something to discuss with my partner.”

Ethan works his jaw hard, his eyes narrowed at Luke “Very well.”

But when he turns to me, he leans forward and presses a kiss on my cheek, leaving me frozen with surprise.

“I will see you in the evening, Elise.” He says before turning around and leaving

I blink, trying to piece together what just happened when Luke steers me away to his room, his face oddly taut. He

slams the door shut once we’re inside, snapping me out of my thoughts

“Did you find a map?” I ask, getting my bearings together

“No,” Luke growls lowly “And I don’t think we will.”

My brows knit together “Why?”

Luke holds my gaze, his own reflecting a hint of discontent.

“Everyone’s maps are missing.”

My eyes widen, panic swirls in my head like a rough tide.

“Or at least it appears to be that way.” Luke says “I checked every inch of all of theirs’ rooms.”

“What are we going to do?” I ask, horrified

“What we always do,” He tells me “Find a way out.”

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“How though?” I ask “What if whoever took it has already gotten rid of them? Burned them? Ripped them to shed?

Ate them?!”

Luke drags a hand down his face, rubbing his jaw “I’m thinking.”

Silence falls around us as both of us rake our heads.

“Can you make a copy? You’ve looked at it a thousand times.”

“I can only make out our path, not the traps.” Luke says “With the new map we had, it was already hard enough to avoid them.”

I worry my bottom lip “We need help.”

“What?”

I level Luke with a steely glance “We need to ally, somehow get someone to help us.”

Luke crosses his arms “Why would they?”

“Everyone is about to be shoved down the same hole,” I say “They won’t have a choice.”

“Who do you suggest?” Luke says “Parks and his beta, Anderson?”

I nod blatantly “Ethan will help, I know he would.”

“Because of you?”

I give Luke an applauded glance “Excuse me?”

“I see the way he looks at you, Hazel.” Luke says a muscle in his cheek twitches “Hell, he makes a great show of it.”

For a moment I consider hitting him on the head for being so idiotic. Alright, maybe Ethan likes me but I’m dead sure he considers the Hunt more important.

I keep my eyes on Luke, trying and failing to piece together why he’s so irritated about it.

With a sigh, I walk over to him. Unthinking, my hand reaches up to rest against his cheek.

“What is wrong?” I ask, my brows furrowed “So Ethan likes me, why does it matter?”

“And you?” Luke asks “Do you like him?”

“I told you, he’s my friend,” I say, dropping my hand from his cheek

Luke catches my hand in his own, searching my face “That’s all?”

I can’t help the laugh that escapes me while taking in his worried look as if I’m about to proclaim my undying love for someone I barely know.

“Yes, that’s all,” I say, chuckling

Luke doesn’t find it mildly amusing. He stares straight at me, I hold his gaze, patiently waiting for him to confirm that I’m not about to elope into Ethan’s waiting arms.

Finally, Luke’s shoulders relax, he lets go of my hand only to hold my face in both of his. His forehead falls against my own, making me stare at him, wide-eyed.

Luke takes a deep, deep breath “Good.”

For some reason, my heart flutters in my chest, my skin tingling. I like it. I like how his hands feel on my face, how his scent is enveloping me, how I can see every angle of his face. Something tugs at my heart, a desire to be

closer still.

Then Luke straightens, letting go of me “Let’s go make some deals.”

...

“We don’t have our map either,” Tyler says, eyes wide in shock

Luke and I are currently in Ethan’s room, telling them to check if they have their map since we can’t find ours.

“Oh Goddess,” I pretend to be horror-struck

“That confirms it,” Luke says “We’ve been ambushed.”

“By whom?” Ethan says “This is neutral territory.”

“All the more chance to get us to lower our guard,” Luke says

“We need to report this,” Ethan says

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Luke raises his eyebrow at him “What proof do we have that someone stole our maps? By complaining, we will only be pointing fingers at the Alpha Supreme’s hospitality. I cant see how that ends well.”

“I might know what to do.” Tyler says, surprising us all “Stone was telling me about shifting our weapons and some things to the top floor of the main castle building. Somethings regarding the hunt from the Alpha Supreme’s main

office.”

“It might have this year’s Hunt map!” I say

“Or it might not.” Luke pops my bubble of optimism “But it’s our best bet.”

Just then, the door knocks, and a maid comes in. she offers us a small bow before saying;

“The party is about to start, we request all of you to come to the main castle building.”

She turns to focus her eyes on me “Come with me, Ms. Attwood, we need to get you ready.”

I look down at my attire “I am ready. This should be enough, right?”

“Nonsense, Miss.” She takes my arms and starts pulling me forward
“Come along.”

An arm wraps around my waist and tugs me back, making her hands fall off me.

“I will be at her room to pick her up,” Luke says, his voice mildly threatening “How long until you’re done?”

The maid swallows thickly “Not long. Only a few hours—

“Thirty minutes.”

“T-Thirty minutes?” the maid squeaks out, her green eyes the size of the moon

“Is that a problem?” Luke growls lowly

“N-No.” the maid shudders, then turns to look at me in a whole new light
“Come along, Miss.”

She hurries out of the door. I look at Luke, trying to hold back my smile as I give him an unimpressed glance.

“You want me to look hideous, don’t you?” I ask

“I’m just speaking logic, Hazel.” He says “It shouldn’t take you more than thirty minutes to shower and get dressed.

You don’t need makeup, you don’t need jewelry. Why waste time?”

“Miss Attwood?” the maid peeks in again “Hurry, please.”

“Coming,” I say, unwrapping Luke’s arm from around me and hurriedly follow her

Gloria, as the maid told me her name, helped me get ready in record time, and just as thirty minutes were over, a very familiar bossy Alpha entered my room, ready to beat someone into pulp.

“I’m alive,” I say, getting up from in front of the dresser “You can stop glaring.”

“This is what my neutral face looks like,”

I can’t help but laugh a little. Since when did Luke become funny? I have no idea. Maybe it’s just the fact that I have nothing better to laugh about and my nerves are skyrocketing.

“I thought this was middle thing,” he says, raising an eyebrow at my dress

“Gloria said I’d be more comfortable in this,” I soothe the non-existent creases on the pale gold dress I’m wearing

I walk over to him, trying not to trip on my heels. Luke is dressed simply in a plain white shirt, dark jeans, and a jacket. Hmm, I wonder why they had us dressed in modern clothes.

“And the fact that I look hell-hot doesn’t bother either.” I give him a bright smile

“You’re certainly easy on the eyes,” I expect Luke to offer me his arm but instead he wraps an arm around my waist and starts walking “A little too much.”

“What now?” I ask, trying to ignore how my heart beats faster due to our proximity “How do we reach the top floor?”

“Tyler is up to that,” Luke says “He’s going to check if there’s anything useful there.”

“And if there is?” I ask, we descend a staircase and I feel my eyes widen

“Then we take back what’s been taken from us.”

Clary was right when she said there’s a party here. The ballroom in front of me has been converted into some kind of club. Lights flashing, music pulsing, the smell of alcohol already thick in the air.

I feel Luke tense beside me “Stay close.”

I open my mouth to tell him to stop being such an old man and let me have some fun when I see Ethan walking over to us.

“Anything new?” Luke asks him, I notice how his hold on me tightens. Jealously alert!

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Ethan notices it as well, but says nothing about it “There are guards at the floor entrance.”

“Couldn’t he have taken them out?” Luke’s eyes narrow

“Five armed men against one who can’t even access his wolf?” Ethan gives him a hard look “by all means, Winters.

You can go and try.”

Luke’s eyes flicker to me for a bare second. I take his arm off my waist. There are better things to do than keeping an eye on me.

“You go ahead,” I say “I can handle myself.”

Luke looks around the club like a ballroom, determination embedded in his voice when he says; “I’m not leaving you here.”

“You can’t be thinking of taking her up there,” Ethan says

Luke narrows his eyes, glaring daggers at him as he takes a step forward but I act before he could start a brawl.

Of their own volition, my feet hold themselves up on their toes, my hands wrapped around Luke’s arm and my lips fall on his cheek.

“I can handle a party,” I say in his ear, over the blasting music “And you can handle five armed men. Let’s both do what we do best.”

I let go of him, grinning at his surprised face, and then promptly make my way through the crowd.

Time to have some fun.

I reach the DJ and manage to get a word in his ear. He grins at me, his teeth too bright against his tan skin before he puts on my song.

“Elise!” Ethan barely catches up to me

“Come on!” I grab his arm and drag him to the dance floor

“You want to dance right now?” he asks, a surprised laugh follows

“You can’t expect me to face certain doom without having a little fun,” I laugh

“And the fact that your partner is on his way to get beaten up doesn’t bother you?”

I huff “Luke is probably going to do all the beating there.”

“You think so?” Ethan raises an eyebrow

I shake my head and grin “I know so.”

For a short while, we stay on the dance floor but then the stupid heels start hurting my feet. Ethan and I walk over to the food tables and I slump down in a chair, taking off my heels.

I look at the entrance, eyebrows furrowed.

“What’s taking so long?” Ethan says what was thinking

“Maybe we should check,” I say, getting to my bare feet

“You stay here,” Ethan says “I’ll go and see.”

“But—

“Stay put, Elise.” And he’s gone

I stomp my foot on the marble floor before I promptly sit back down in my chair. Yeah, just leave me here to be eaten up by worry!

“Elise!” I look up to see Clary

“Hey,” I smile at her “What’s up?”

“Nothing much,” Clary shrugs “Want to hang out with us?”

“Us?” I raise my eyebrow

As if on cue, three other girls come there. One of them, a girl with a blond pixie cut smiles at me warmly.

“You must be Elise,” she says “Clary told us about you. We’re going over to the poolside, wanna join us?”

“There’s a pool?!” I stare at them wide-eyed

Clary grins “I’ll take that as yes.”

Alpha’s Hunt by Starlight Chapter 37

Chapter 37 In the end

✧ Luke’s POV ✧

I see her disappear in the crowd, my skin still tingling where she touched it.

As much as I trust Hazel, I don’t trust anyone else with her. but she’s right, we need to act fast lest we lose our only chance.

With a deep breath, I turn my gaze to Parks, making sure to put every bit of authority in my soul in that look.

Considering the irritated gleam in his eyes, I suppose it’s working.

“Keep your eyes on her,” I say, my voice hard even to my ears “And I’ll be keeping mine on you.”

“Are you so sure I need to be watched, Winters?” he crosses his arms
“I’m not the untamed one here.”

A growl claws at my throat to let it out, I can almost feel my fingers
elongating. The beast hasn’t had a dose of

wolfsbane in a long while and it’s eager to break through the chains of
restraint.

“You shouldn’t even be allowed on this Hunt.” Parks says, scorn obvious
in his tone “Let alone with Elise as your
companion.”

My hands are itching to close around something.

“You’re the biggest threat to her—

Unbidden, my hand reaches out to grab him by the shirt front. I relish the
flicker of unadulterated fear that crosses his face, even if for a second.

“So you know what I might become,” I say slowly, my voice rough
around the edges like a jagged knife “What I am capable of doing, still
you’re standing here, spewing out b*****. I must say Parks, you’re a
bigger idiot than I gave you credit for.”

I let go of him, he staggers back. Instantly, he straightens himself,
loathing clear on his face.

“Stay in your limits, Pup.” I look down at him “The next time I have to
remind you wouldn’t be so painless.”

I turn around, willing the beast to recede. I need to get it together, we
need to escape this place before any more

'incidents' decide to happen. I need to get Hazel out of here.

My fingers turn back to normal, reason takes over instinct as I go farther away from the noise in the ballroom.

I find Anderson in the middle of a staircase.

"Where are you going?" he asks, raising an eyebrow at me

"To get to that damn office," I say

"You can be thinking of taking all the guards out." Anderson says "Even if you somehow do, there's no saying the map is there."

"Just the fact that there are five guards outside one door leads me to think it's there."

"Look, Winters," he says "As much as I would love to punch someone in the face given our situation, we need to think this through."

I cross my arms across my chest "I'm listening."

"If we take out the guards," he says "They see our faces, they will report as just as they get the chance. Even with the

map, both of our teams will be disqualified for compromising neutral territory."

As much as I hate to admit it, he's right. We need a plan, a diversion.

"Let's have a look at the battleground." I walk past him to the upper floor, Anderson follows behind silently

We reach the top floor and peek in the hallway Anderson points out. Five guards, two near the big double door, two across from them, one at the

other end of the hallway. Armed with rifles, their wolves are probably ready for action.

We move away, out of earshot before he says “Well? What do you suggest?”

“We need a distraction.”

“I don’t see your partner anywhere.”

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I narrow my eyes, his lip tug upwards “Calm down, Winters. I’m saying she’s usually more than ready for this type of thing.”

“Keep your words clear when you talk to me,” About her “You might end up regretting talking in riddles, Anderson.”

I turn around the information about the guards in my head, a**essing it from every angle. My mind takes each

obstacle, searching for potential solutions.

“Follow my lead.”

...

I meet Anderson’s eyes across the hallway and nod. He slams down a vase on the granite floor. I see one of the guards move forward and spin towards the corridor I’m standing in.

I cross the hallway and glance out of the other ending, where the solitary guard is standing. I can faintly make out the conversation Anderson is

having with the guard, doing a surprisingly good imitation of a drunk guest.

I grab the guard by his throat and yank him towards me. Instantly, I hold him in a headlock. He struggles for a moment, then his body goes limp. I let him down and grab his gun, hoping Anderson has managed to do the same.

The first shot rings.

Anderson's made his move.

The next moment gunshots ring in the air, bullets ricochet everywhere and in theory, the sounds should not reach the

the ground floor over the loud sounds of music.

I take out the two guards near the door, Anderson takes out the other one across them.

The smell of blood hangs heavy in the air, I pick up a stray bullet. Not silver. They should survive easily.

Anderson and I pull down the handkerchiefs from our faces, the ones we lifted from a nearby room, and he tries to pull the door open.

“Locked.” He throws his hands up

I look down at the rifle in his hands, we could certainly shoot the lockout but that would leave too much to open. I

don't want every other team to have access to the maps too— that is, if they are in here.

Before either of us could think of a better solution, a familiar face comes into view.

Parks glances at the unconscious guards for a moment, then at the door.

“Didn’t find the map?” he asks

Anderson shakes his head “The door’s locked.”

“Where’s Hazel?” I ask

“I told her to stay back at the party.”

“You what?” I glare at him, eyes narrowed

“You wanted me to bring her here?” He motions to our surrounding

“I told you to keep an eye on her, damnit!” I shove him aside and start towards the stairs

“Why are you over-reacting?” Parks says from behind me, I hear his and Anderson’s footsteps behind me “What can happen to her there?”

“Anything.” You don’t know her as I do

I take a sharp turn towards the ballroom, music bustling through the air. the smell of alcohol heavily mixed with perfumes makes it harder to find her scent.

“Look around,” I say to the other two “Whoever finds her waits for the others at the entrance.”

I don’t wait for an answer and start walking through the crowd. Goddess, she could be anywhere, and knowing her, it’s probably in some kind of problem.

My eyes scan the ma** of bodies fruitlessly. I get out of the crowds and search the sidelines. Where are you? Almost about to turn away, I spot a door at the farther ending of the ballroom. I try to open it and it gives away easily.

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A narrow hallway enters my vision and I sense it then; the faint trail of gardenia flowers and rain. Why the hell should she come here?

My mind instantly conjures up the worst possibilities as I sprint through the hallway, faint sounds reach my ear, and I

see a speck of light at the far end.

When I come out, my eyes take in the detail of the place. A gilded room, high curtains of the windows, sofas and

showpieces littered across the marble floor but in the major space of the room is taken up by a pool, the steaming water fogs the air.

A laugh reaches my ears and my snaps in the direction of the sound.

I find her sitting in a group of boys and girls, legs hanging in the water, a gla** held loosely in her hand as she throws

her head back and laughs again.

I make my way towards her, relieved, irritated, angry.

How could she be here, without telling anyone, when the situation is so dire? Didn't she think how worried I'd be for her?

But as I got closer, I realize how sloppy her movements are, how drawling her voice is. Oh moon, no. Not right now—

Hazy, golden eyes lift to my face and a breathtaking smile greet me. I halt in my steps for a moment.

“Luke!” Hazel waves at me animatedly

The three boys and two girls around her turn to look at me as well, their gazes ranging from confused to annoyed to lusty.

Hazel stands up from her place but before she could walk over to me and quite possibly fall due to her state, I reach her.

She throws her arms around me “You’re alive!”

I tell myself to keep in mind my anger, my annoyance. To tell her just how stupid it was to come here and on top of that, getting drunk, but all that floats away but just seeing that she’s alright.

I sigh. Goddess, this girl makes me act strange.

Wrapping my arms around her, I straighten her slouched frame “Why wouldn’t I be alive?”

She looks up at me with doe hazel eyes, eyebrows furrowed “Didn’t you go on some dangerous mission? I was waiting for you, but you didn’t come back. In the end, I had to get myself some happy juice.”

“Come on,” I say “We’re going back now.”

I expected her to retaliate but Hazel surprised me by nodding, I shift my hold on her so my arm is around her

shoulders and I hold her hand with my other.

“Elise,” One of the girls says “You should stay for a while. Won’t introduce us to your friend?”

Hazel gasps, tipsily turning around to look at her “I almost forgot!”

“This is Luke, my partner in crime.” She says “Luke, these are the nice people who didn’t let me get bored or worried. Clary, Emily, Cameron, Freddie and, what was it again? Oh and Zander.”

“That’s all the introduction you’ll give us?” Emily says, eyeing me like candy. The girl is lucky she’s drunk

otherwise, the look on my face would probably hurt “What else is your partner like?”

“Sorry Em,” Hazel says apologetically “That information is confidential. Bye!”

She turns to me “Aren’t we going?”

We’d almost crossed the room when she stops a look of realization on her face “My shoes!”

I look down at her feet, only now realizing she’s not wearing her shoes. Hazel looks across the room before she

points out a sofa where she’d probably taken them off.

“You go,” she tells me “I’ll just be back real quick.”

“I’m coming with you.” I’m not letting you out of my sight again

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“Then don’t bother me by saying hurry up!” Hazel says “Putting on shoes is a concentrating task.”

I roll my eyes despite the upward tilt of my lips. Hazel promptly sits down on the sofa and starts putting her shoes on.

Or that’s what I think this is.

“Get on!” she mutters, yanking the shoe on her foot “What is wrong with you things? You were fitting so well a while ago.”

“Maybe that has something to do with putting on the wrong one, Hazel.”

She huffs and flips her hair over her shoulder “I know which shoe goes in which foot. Maybe I just need to clear my head.”

She grabs a box of mint from a side table and tosses two in her mouth “Right, now I can fix this.”

She again fails to distinguish between the left and right shoe. I pinch the bridge of my nose and let out a breath. We don’t have time for this.

I crouch down and take the shoes from her, her skin is cold from sitting in the water.

Hazel giggles as I slid the shoes on her feet, I look up at her, eyebrow raised.

“This is like Cinderella,” she says “but you’re better looking than the prince.”

Unbidden, a thought hits my head. I should not be thinking about this, I should be thinking about how to open that door, I should be thinking that those guards might wake up and all of this would be for nothing but still the words

wretch themselves out of my mouth;

“What am I like?”

“That’s confidential information.”

“Why so?” I ask, somehow my hand finds its way towards hers, holding it gently

Lycans are naturally stronger than werewolves, and I can easily bruise a Lycan with a bit of force. I always have to be careful while holding her, the barest bit of pressure would hurt her. It’s like handling gla**.

The gla** might cut more than it breaks.

“I had to spend more than a month staying with you day and night to gather this information,” Hazel says

“Well, it is about me,” I say, my voice almost soft “I have the right to know.”

“If you put it that way...” Hazel looks around, then ushers me closer, leaning down herself

Her face is inches from mine, featured schooled into perfect seriousness.

“You’re snappy, and bossy and demanding.” She says I can almost feel my facial muscles wanting to form a scowl “And you never look up from that damned map.

“And you can beat anyone up without a second thought. You only ever think about this Hunt and do anything to win, even if that means flirting with a witch.”

I didn’t think of myself as so dishonorable.

“But,” Hazel brushes her fingers across my cheek, her golden eyes following their movement “You’re different to me... you don’t say what you don’t mean, you don’t do what you don’t want to. You may act indifferent, but you care. In protecting me, respecting me, treating me like an equal, you show me that you care.”

She pulls her hand away, a little laugh escapes her. I stare in confusion, wondering why the sudden change in mood.

“I wonder how long it will last,” She says with a shake of her head

“My care for you?” I ask, she nods “Why?”

“People tend to back away and leave when they realize I have emotions other than happy or optimistic.” She says

“You think I’m like those people?”

When she looks at me again, her smile is almost sad, almost longing.

“Darling, in the end, they all leave.”

Alpha’s Hunt by Starlight Chapter 38

Chapter 38 The most lethal one

Elise’s POV

My good angle pats my cheek, my bad angle facepalms herself.

“What are you telling him?!” she says, waving around her poker “That stuff’s personal.”

“Shut up,” my good angle rebukes her “sometimes it’s best to let the feels out.”

But I’m not paying attention to them, my attention is focused on Luke. He’s staring at me like I’m Hunt’s map.

Priceless, something he never wants to lose.

He brushes my hair away from my face and leans forward. For some reason, I stay still, some kind of anticipation

holding me in place.

“You’ll be surprised by how stubborn I can be, Hazel.” He says

“That’s an idiotic thing to be stubborn about.”

“You make me act like an idiot.”

A breath of laughter leaves my mouth “I must be a witch.”

He’s so close, if I move inch, my lips would brush against his. How would it feel? To let the walls crumble down?

“That you are, Hazel.” Luke says “The most lethal one.”

I feel my eyes flutter shut, his warm breath on my face.

Nothing happens.

The next moment, Luke tugs me up and starts walking towards the hallways that lead to... where does it lead to again? Oh well, seems like we’ll just have to find out.

I look up at Luke, confused. Why does he look so tense? Why won't he look at me?

Loud sounds reach me and I realize we're back in the club.

"Oh my moon," I say, gripping Luke's arm "That's my favorite song!"

I take a step towards the dance floor, the lights blinding, but the next moment, Luke steers me away.

"We don't have time for dancing," He says "We need to go."

"Go where?" I give him a look. Why did I ever think he's nice?

"Oh thank moon," Two Ethans and Tylers walk over to us "I was afraid you'd never find her."

"Finally," I roll my eyes "Now that everyone's here, can anyone tell me what the hell is happening?"

The five of them ignore me. The twin Tylers turn to Luke and start talking about some unconscious guards the twins have locked in a room or something.

"Good," Luke says "We'll check up on that lock just after we drop her to her room."

"Her?" I blink fifty times "We have another girl in our team? Why didn't anyone tell me?"

"Why don't you meet her?" Luke says, starting to walk, taking me along "She's waiting in your room."

I nod, eager to meet this new arrival. Why didn't I notice before? Have these idiots been treating her like a damsel in distress too? Oh heavens, is she a damsel in distress? We won't get along if she is.

By the time we reach my room, Luke is practically dragging me. I don't mind it though, his arms feel nice around me.

So warm and strong.

"This girl will get herself crushed," my bad angle mutters

"I think its cute," my good angle says

"Go away you two," I mutter

"Us?" Twin Ethans ask in sync, looking at twin Tylers

"Not you four," I wave my hand dismissively "I'm talking to my angles, they're annoying."

"Hey," My bad angle scowls just like Luke

Luke sits me on the bed, I feel a wave of sleepiness crash over me.

"So, where's the new girl?" I look around the empty room. Is she in the bathroom?

"She'll be here shortly," Luke says to me "Why don't you sleep while she's not here?"

"Hmm," I put my finger on my chin "I am sleepy..."

"See?" Luke says "If you're sleepy while meeting her, it'll be really rude."

I nod. Luke is smart, he's probably right this one time.

I see the twin Ethans and Tylers go to the door and out, Luke follows them.

"You idiot!" my bad angel says "They're fooling you! leaving you behind!"

I bolt upright, the muddled words from Tyler and Luke's conversation come back to me.

"Hey!" I march up to Luke "You b*****! You think you can just leave me here?"

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He exchanges a look with Ethan and Tyler. Hmm, I guess I scared away their twins.

"Hazel, calm down." Luke says "You need to stay here."

"I won't!" I stomp my foot "I am not some little girl! I can handle myself."

"As you did at the party?" he crosses his arms

I glare at him "You don't want me to repeat that it's your fault I got the happy juice."

"Elise, love," Ethan puts his hands on my shoulders "It's dangerous for you to go, please understand."

"Oh shut up!" I step away from him "You three need to swallow your egos and include me in this plan."

The door bursts open, a man comes in swaying on his feet. Everyone except for me tenses, Goddess these people need to relax.

The man at the door opens his mouth, blood comes out and drips from his chin. Then he falls, face first on the

floor, the hilt of a knife protruding from between his shoulder blades.

Luke crouches down in front of him and pulls the knife out, blood dripping from the sharp blade.

I stare wide-eyed at the corpse, faintly remembering who it is. Alpha Hugo.

“Elise, love, don’t look—

My eyes drift away from the corpse and towards Luke, towards the silhouette in the doorway

“Watch out!” words wrench their way out of my mouth

The next instant, Luke is tackling down the black-clad figure, his hand comes down, and a sickening thud! reaches my ears.

A riot of sounds reaches me, the next moment, I’m being dragged out of the room, Luke’s hand like a vice on my arm.

“Who was that?” Ethan is saying

Luke gives him a controlled glare “Someone trying to kill us.”

“Where are we going now?” I ask

“The castle’s top floor,” Tyler turns to a staircase “That’s where our maps and weapons are.”

The lights go out.

I bump into Luke as he halts to a stop. The moonlight from the windows illuminates little patches of the granite floor.

I see a black figure move through one of them.

A scream rips its way out of my mouth. There’s a woosh! through the air, followed by a groan and a dull thud.

Luke grabs both my arms, I briefly wonder where his knife went, and opens a random door in the hallway. All of us shuffle in and I realize it’s a broom’s closet, barely big enough for us.

“I can hear them,” Luke whispers “fifteen, maybe more.”

“Then pray they don’t open this door.” Ethan whispers

I can’t see anything in the dark, I’m almost squashed against the wall. The walls are so tight, unbidden memories assault my head.

‘ “Really?” I’d asked Darcie “We’re friends now?”

“Of course,” she said, the other girls with her giggled “We’re taking you to our secret headquarters right now.”

I nodded, my thirteen-year-old head swimming with new pride. The beta’s daughter was befriending me. I could imagine the sneers and glares going away. I could imagine my mom being proud that I’m finally getting along. She always told me this pack is our home, and I have to treat it as such.

“Now close your eyes, Elise.” Darcie said, “Promise you won’t open them, so we know you’re trustworthy.”

I nodded, determined to prove that I am trustworthy. They led me through the pack mansion and then stopped.

The next moment I have shoved away, my eyes flew open and I heard a door slamming shut. It was dark, so dark I couldn’t make out my own hands.

“D-Darice?” I called, hands held out “What is going on?”

Roars of laughter reached me “This is where you belong, little b****.”

“This-This isn’t funny,” I found a handle “Open the door!”

“Why?” Darcie asked from outside “We’re putting you in a coffin, soon they’re going to bury you six feet under.”

I told myself she’s lying, I told myself it couldn’t be a coffin, but she was the beta’s daughter. She could do that. They would bury me alive.

“Open the door!” I was screaming then, pounding hard at what I was desperately telling myself was a door

The walls were closing in on me, I couldn’t breathe. The dark was overwhelming. Tears streamed down my face, but no one saw, no one heard my screams. The pack adults were off to a meeting. They couldn’t hear me.

‘Would it matter if they could?’

Those words settled like ice in my bones.

I screamed anyway, I cried anyway, I pounded the door anyways. I could feel my head getting heavy, my eyes

dropping, my heart pumping madly.

I numbly registered falling and the last thought in my head was;

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‘This is not my home.’

Hours later, I would wake up in the packed medical room, my mom by my side, no one to believe that Darcie had locked me up. They thought I had somehow managed to lock myself.

Laying in a hospital wing, my mother’s head laying on the mattress, her hand clutching mine. She believed me when I told her, but she couldn’t do anything about it. I pretended to be asleep when she fell asleep crying.

That night I knew this isn’t the life I want, these aren’t the people I will live with.

I will find the happiness and freedom I deserve, we deserve. And if I’m not handed that, I will take it by force.’

I can hear my ragged breaths, I press a hand down my chest, trying to push out the air trapped in my lungs. I blink and blink and blink but I can’t see anything. The dark will swallow me whole.

“Hazel,” a voice is saying, so faint, so far away

“Open the door,” I scream, a whimper escapes my mouth

“Elise, what—

I push through the barriers, trying to reach the handle. I need to get out. They're going to bury me alive.

My hands graze the cool metal but before I could open it, something wraps around me and pull me back.

"Hazel, what are you doing?"

"Let me out," I struggle against its hold, my voice raspy, "I said, let me out!"

Someone hisses "Attwood, this isn't the time for this."

"What is wrong with her?" a worried voice says, I can't see, I can't see, I can't see who it is

Then I've turned around, something warm on my arms, like hands. I'm not alone.

"Hazel," Hands-on my face. Warm breath on my skin. "Elise, what's wrong?"

I know that voice, I rake my head to attach it to a face, an image.

"Luke," I breathe out, my hands reach out blindly and I hold onto him desperately "Luke, get me out of here."

"Hazel, I can't."

I hate the sharp sting behind my eyes, but it's too dark. No one will see. People never see.

"I can hear them coming," a voice hisses "Don't make any sound!"

“Luke, I can’t s-stay here,” Who is this scared stranger speaking from my mouth? “Please.”

“They’re here,” someone frantically whispers yells

I open my mouth to say something but Luke’s voice reaches me first.

“Don’t slap me for this,” I can feel the words being breathed on my lips
“At least not in front of them.”

Then something warm pressed against my lips. Not a finger this time.

The thoughts in my head evaporate like water on red hot metal, the steam clouds my mind.

For some reason, my eyes fall shut and I can’t see anything but the dark is not treating this time, it’s secretive,

private. My mind shuts down and I can’t think anything. I can only feel, feel, feel something warm and soft strangely moving against my lips, in a way that makes my heartbeat with the speed of a bullet train, makes my lungs forget how they work and my stomach fill with b***erflies.

And the oddest of it all, it makes my lips move in a rhythm.

I feel two arms wrap around me and lift me, my hands skillfully find their way around something before they travel into something soft like hair.

A growl rumbles through me. Strange, I’m not growling.

Then I hear something, so quiet I don’t know if it was meant for me to hear;

“Mine.”

For some reason, that word tugs at my madly beating heart, as if in agreement.

Someone coughs— Loudly.

The pressure against my lips is gone. My eyes flutter open, someone has opened the door to let the light in. My eyes meet dark blue ones looking up at me. I blink.

“How did you become so short?” I ask Luke

I feel my feet touch the ground again and Luke’s height magically goes back to normal. I sway on my feet and hold onto him for support.

“Why do my legs feel like jelly?” I ask, eyebrows furrowed in confusion

“Did I black out and drop on my face? Cuz I

feel my lips tingling.”

Ethan doesn’t answer me and keeps glaring at Luke, Tyler shifts on his feet, looking distinctly uncomfortable. Luke

simply clears his throat before asking;

“Are they gone?”

Ethan works his jaw hard, his poor teeth “Yes, quite a few minutes ago.”

I step away from Luke and stumble out of the small place. The lights are back on. I take a few deep breaths, but I

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already feel calmer. Maybe the strange blackout helped.

“Maybe they went away—

A gruff voice cuts me off;

“Get them!”

Then we’re running again, Luke suddenly halts to a stop. I register myself being given into Ethan’s arms.

“Go,” Luke says “I’ll hold them back, keep her safe.”

“Luke, what are you—

“Hazel, trust me,” Luke says “I need you to stay safe. I’ll be back before you know it.”

Loud footsteps echo in the empty hallway, Luke’s face gives away nothing since his words have slapped all the panic on mine.

“No,” I’m shaking my head “No, I’m not leaving you here!”

Luke turns to Ethan “Go, don’t turn back.”

With a nod, he swings me over his shoulder “Sorry, Elise. This isn’t a time to argue.”

“Wha— let me down!” I punch his back hard, he huffs a bit but keeps running “Let me go, you b*****!”

My head spins as he takes the stairs, my ribs aching as I struggle to slip from his hold. Then I’m suddenly put on my feet in front of a double door.

“How do we open this darn thing?” Tyler rattles the handles

I shake my numbing head, whatever this door leads to is safer than here. Luke said to stay safe. That b*****, when he comes back I'm going to strangle him with my bare hands. But I have to be alive for that.

I a**ess the lock, putting my eye on the keyhole. It cant be so hard.

“I need something like long needles,” I say

“What?” Ethan says, his eyebrows raised “You can open it?”

“I used to pick locks all the time,” I say “But I don't have my lockpicks.”

“You what?”

“Have you gone deaf, Parks?”

I whirl around, Luke's coming up the stairs, his once white shirt now red with blood. His lip is bleeding, so is his brow, but if he can walk over to me so fast, he must be fine.

In a single swift movement, he pulls a pin out of my hair, then the next.

“Will this do?” He says, holding them for me

“It'll have to,” I unfold their bends, making them into clumsy long metal picks

I get to work, my movements are not as precise as they should be. I can hear someone coming up the stairs.

“Hurry,” Tyler says, I kick out in his direction without looking, the sudden ‘Omph’ tells me I hit him right

“Brace yourselves,” Luke says as the footsteps get louder

Click!

“To be amazed by me,” I shove the door open, everyone hurries in

Luke bolts the door, only moments later I hear people pounding on it.

“s***ter,” Luke says, already moving towards a desk by the far wall

“Look for the maps, weapons, anything useful.”

All of us spread across the heavily packed room, shuffling through boxes and cartons, shelves, and showpieces.

The pounding on the door becomes strategized. They’re coming at it all at once.

“Nothing,” I say, shoving aside the last box against the wall I was searching, a hangover partially upon me

“I found something,” Tyler says, he’s holding up two belts, two revolvers in each of their’s holdings “They’re loaded.”

“There’s no map here,” Ethan says, running a hand through his hair

The door moves violently, almost breaking off its hinges. I look down a window, in the pale moonlight, the earth is impossibly far. We just trapped ourselves.

“Luke?” I look at him, fear knocking at my mind’s door, or maybe that’s the hangover

Ethan and Tyler turn to look at him as well, but he’s saying nothing, doing nothing as he stands over the desk, palms flat on the polished wooden top.

The door rattles again. It won't last long.

"We're done," Tyler says, his shoulders slumping

"Not yet we're not," Luke says he meets my eyes across the room, there's uncertainty in them, but also a promise.

"Turn off the lights."

And we're enveloped by darkness again.

Alpha's Hunt by Starlight Chapter 39

Chapter 39 Forget manners

The door bursts open.

About eight men shuffle inside, rifles in their hands, black masks on their faces. The open door lets light into the darkroom.

I feel the revolver in my hand, testing my grip. I wait until all of them are inside, moving from between the maze of heavy shelves we made just after the door.

I hold up the revolver and pull the trigger to give the signal.

A loud rumble shakes the floor as all the shelves collapse on the black-clad figures. Luke, Ethan, and Tyler come out from over the heap of shelves, our ambushers groaning and struggling beneath the wood.

"Come on," Luke grabs my arm, racing down the hallways, we take a sharp turn towards the tower we were staying in

Luke bursts into his room, Ethan and Tyler turn towards their own. He yanks a bag out from under his bed and then without waiting for me, turns to my room.

“We need to get the hell out of here before they come back,” Luke says, opening my closet and stuffing clothes in the bag

“Wait, you knew?” I asked wide-eyed as he slings it over his shoulder

“I suspected,” he says “And I trust my instinct.”

“The exits must be locked,” Ethan says, as he and Tyler come inside “I saw guards moving there when we went to the party.”

“That won’t be a problem,” Luke says, he bolts the door of my room and strides towards the window

“We’re on the second floor,” he says, looking down “We should be able to make it.”

Tyler goes first, then Ethan. I bite my bottom lip hard, staring down at the ground hesitantly. Luke turns to me;

“Hazel, we have to go.” He puts a hand on my shoulder and squeezes

“I know,” I mumble, my fingernails dig in my palms

“Jump, I’ll be right after you.”

“What if I fall?”

Luke takes a breath as if it’s costing him to say; “Parks will catch you.”

I swallow thickly “What if he can’t?”

A beat of silence passes between us.

“If I go first,” Luke says, quietly “Will you trust me to catch you?”

I turn to look at him, his dark stormy gaze meets mine. Since when have I associated this face with trust? Since when

have I started to believe the words spoken by this voice?

I take a shaky breath “You will catch me?”

Luke keeps staring at me for a moment, his face impassive granite.

He takes my hand in his and presses a kiss to my knuckles “I would never let you fall, Hazel.”

Someone pounds on the door, I jump away from Luke. He meets my eyes for a second, then leaps down from the window, landing neatly on his feet. Luke opens his arms for me, my heart jumps to my throat.

The pounding on the door intensifies. I look back at it, I look back at Luke.

Trust him, I close my eyes and sit on the windowsill, Just trust him, Elise.

The door slams open.

I jump.

The wind lifts my hand, gravity sucks me down and I brace myself for the fall, for the agony that will follow, for the broken bones and bruises.

Then the wind stops, my hair falls back down, my arms reach out instinctively to hold onto something for support but

I refuse to open my eyes.

“Elise,” A shiver goes down my spine, “I told you I won’t let you fall, Hazel.”

I open my eyes to find Luke staring down at me, the intensity of his gaze makes my heart squirm in place.

“Let’s get the hell out of here,” I say

The barest smile flickers across his face and he puts me to my feet, interlocking his fingers with mine.

“What now?” I ask “We don’t have the map.”

“I think I know where to go,” Ethan says “Follow me.”

We keep a fast pace, even though I’m wearing heels, I can walk just fine. It’s beyond me how they are so comfortable.

Probably magic.

My head starts pulsing with the hangover headache, my eyes dropping, my limbs telling me I have to sleep lest I pa** out.

“How further do we have to go?” I ask and repress a yawn

“Just a few miles,” Ethan glances at me “Are you alright?”

My back straightens, my face coming taut with focus and will “I’m fine.”

I can feel Luke’s eyes on me but I refuse to let him know I’m tired and my head is about to explode into bits. I won’t let these higher-ups think I’m a weak little girl.

We walk on and on, I can feel every single muscle in my body pulsing with strain. My jaw tightens as I push forward,

I'm sure if I stop for a moment, my legs will shake.

Come on, Elise! There's only like what? A few miles to go? You can do this! Remember you will, your

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determination, your—

“Hazel,” a voice whispers in my ear

I yelp in surprise, jumping away from the source, my heel clad feet stumble in the uneven earth and I fall directly in

my behind.

I turn to him with a death glare “What the hell, Luke?”

He gives me a composed look and crosses his arms “I was going to tell you to walk carefully from here onwards.”

I narrow my eyes “Thank you so much.”

Before I could get up on my own, he takes my arms and stands me up, I sway a little on my feet. Crap! They're all going to know I'm about to collapse.

“Did you hurt your ankle again?” Luke says before I could answer, he lets out an irritated sigh “How many times do

I need to tell you to be careful. We can't stop right now.”

He stares at me for a moment, a thoughtful expression on his face. Then he looks up and murmurs; “I can’t believe

I’m doing this,”

He lets go and turns around, crouching down. I stare at him, applauded. Is he really... offering to carry me?

“Well?” a very familiar, hard, and impatient voice says “Will do you the honors?”

“Winters, if you don’t want to,” Ethan says “I would gladly help her.”

“No need,” I say with a dismissive wave of my hand “Luke made me fall so he will have to face the consequences.”

I thank my stars that this dress is not tight and I’m wearing black leggings, otherwise I’d have rather crawled than take a back ride. Our little crew starts walking again, I sigh in comfort, sleep starts taking a harder toll on my senses.

“I noticed what you did, Winters,” I whisper, mindlessly lowering my head so my cheek rests against Luke’s hair

He doesn’t answer for a few moments, I content myself with the fact that he wouldn’t. my eyes flutter shut, sleep

almost has me in its embrace when I hear him say;

“Good.”

...

“Hazel,” someone’s shaking my shoulder gently

I grunt and snuggle deeper in the soft surface, shooing the hand away.

“Hazel, get up.” That annoying hand is now caressing my cheek, but I don’t mind it “Or you’re not hungry?”

My eyes fly open, I see Luke standing over me he pulls back his hand.

“Now that you’ve mentioned food, maybe I can get up after all.” I push myself up the mattress

Wait, mattress?

I look around, only to realize we’re in a room. Not a very good room, mind you. the walls are cracked wood, the roof full of cobwebs, window panes so covered in dirt, they’re almost grey.

“Where are we?” I ask, sitting upon the plain, single bed

“Parks had information about a witch’s house in the forest,” Luke sits down beside me “It’s abandoned for the Hunt.

They were heading here when they were ambushed, but stumbled upon that castle instead.”

I nod. No wonder this place looks like crap, it hasn’t been cleaned in weeks.

I turn my eyes to Luke again “What now? What about our maps?”

“Parks and I are trying to recreate something at least fifty percent as accurate,” He says “It’s shouldn’t take long, we

can leave on our ways from tomorrow.”

Tomorrow. So, I have a day to get my s*** together. I fiddle with the sheets, embarra**ed out of my mind.

“So, umm,” I mumble “Thanks for not letting me get all of us killed.”

Luck c***s his head to a side, his brows pulled together “What?”

My face heats up. Crap, he didn’t even remember, why did I have to say that?

“You know,” I shrug “In the closet.”

We’re enveloped by thick silence. Goddess, why did I have to get drunk? I’d have handled it if I was sober.

I peek at Luke from under my lashes, he’s staring straight at me. finally, he says;

“You don’t have to thank me.”

I cant quantize the relief that crashes over me. I grin at him, feeling my sleepiness and embarra**ment lift completely.

“You don’t want me to apologize to you, you don’t want me to thank you,” I say merrily “So you want me to

completely forget my manners around you?”

Luke stares at me for a moment longer than necessary, his eyes a shade darker “Yes.”

Then he seems to realize what he just said and clears his throat. Luke abruptly stands up, both of us ignore the tension in the room.

“Get yourself something to eat from the bag, change if you want you,” he says, walking toward the door

He stops in the doorway, then looks over his shoulder, so one of his eyes meets mine.

“In the closet,” he says carefully “Do you remember what happened?”

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I try to focus my thoughts. I remember my memories, I remember the panic, I remember Luke holding me and then...

then the door was open and the lights were back on.

“Not exactly,” I say, eyebrows furrowed “I didn’t pa** out, did I?”

Luke lets out a deep, deep breath, his shoulders fall momentarily “No. Nothing happened.”

Without another word, he goes out, closing the door behind.

I change out of the dress into a comfy shirt and shorts, suddenly glad that Clary had given me some of her clothes.

My heart sinks at the thought of her. Was Alpha Supreme’s pack on target too? Or was it just the participants?

Shaking those thoughts out of my head, I wash my face in a bowl of water in the bathroom. I’d have loved a shower but well, this isn’t a hotel, nor am I on a trip.

I munch on crackers, just finished eating a packet of nuts, as I go out of the room. The halls are equally dust-covered.

Soon enough I reach what appears to be the living room. White sheets are bundled in a corner, probably lifted from the furniture. Ethan, Tyler, and Luke are huddled over a big sheet of paper— moon knows where they got that from—

murmuring and making details.

“Good morning,” Ethan smiles at me “How are you feeling?”

“Hungover,” I smile back at him “But I’ll live.”

I sit down by Luke’s side, peering at what they’d made. I didn’t get a lot of glimpses of the map, but this looks quite

similar to it.

“Any idea who it was trying to kill us all?” I ask as I finish my breakfast

Luke pulls out a paper from the pocket of his jacket “I received this early morning.”

I take it from him and unfold it to see elegant, curling writing;

The Alpha Supreme apologizes for the discomfort faced at the second checkpoint. One of the competing teams had managed to contact their pack and had them try to ambush the other teams. The culprits have been disqualified and will receive their punishments.

Wishing you the best,

Beta Superior,

Fredrick Lockhart

“How did you even receive this?” I ask raising an eyebrow

“It p***ed up in the air,” Ethan says “At least that’s how I got mine.”

“Magic,” Tyler says

I roll my eyes. Just how many witches are they paying to arrange this Hunt ?

The rest of the day goes by with me making and taking tea excessively since I found a tin of that in the kitchen and

I’ve found my new pa**ion for making tea. The other three spend their day being ambitious nerds.

I cradle my eighth cup of tea in my hands and stand by a wide window, watching as the sun goes down.

Only a quarter of this Hunt left, and if we win— when we win, I’ll be free of that soon forsaken pack, far from

everyone who’s ever hurt me and mom.

And away from Carlos, Angelina and Morgan.

Away from Luke...

That thought makes my heart twist, my hold on the cup tightens. I never thought I’d live to see the day when the thought of leaving Luke Winters would upset me. But this is his fault.

For being nice to me, caring about me, protecting me, listening to my rants, and for giving me tingles by the barest

touch, he’s entirely at fault.

“Hey,”

I turn sideways, blinking out of my thoughts. Ethan smiles at me, hands in his pockets.

“Hi,” I say, almost sigh

Why did I want it to be Luke who would come to me right now ?

“We’re going our different ways tomorrow,” he says, I nod “I just wanted you to know if you ever need help

adjusting, you can call on me without hesitation.”

I stare at him wide-eyed “Really ?”

Ethan nods seriously.

A smile curls up my lips “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” he says warmly, then hesitates “Are you alright though ? You seemed pretty stressed yesterday.”

I take a sip of my tea, don’t find it necessary to answer it for a moment. Then I looked up at him, my face dead serious.

“How many times,” I ask slowly “Do I need to tell you that I’m not alright, Ethan ?”

His face goes slack for a moment, then his features contorted in worry. I can’t help myself.

I burst out laughing “I’m amazing, remember ?”

Realization dawns on him, and he gives me an irritated look. I force myself to stop laughing, but the grin on my face

doesn't fall.

"Seriously, I'm okay," I say with a chuckle

"Do you," he hesitates again, looks at me with skeptical eyes "Do you remember what happened there? In the

closet?"

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I furrow my brows. Why does everyone keep asking that?

"Not really," I say "Why do you ask? Is there something I should remember?"

Ethan keeps staring at me for a few moments, I feel an anxious turn in my stomach.

"Winters kissed you."

I almost drop my cup "What?"

"To distract you maybe," Ethan lets out a breath "Or so I hope."

But I'm not listening to him, I'm starting wide-eyed somewhere in space, blurry memories trying to clear up in my head.

I can almost feel my heart rate shoot up.

That's fine, I tell myself, I was about to get all of us killed. He had to distract me somehow. It's just a kiss, nothing to fuss about.

But guilt coils like an iron fist around my heart. My first kiss. I'd been saving it for my mate, keeping it safe from the tons of lusty a**holes that just seem to be waiting for me to let my guard down.

But somewhere behind that guilt, there's an even worst thought.

Better Luke than anyone else.

Maybe I'm guilty, but I'm not remorseful. My stomach turns horribly. Why am I not remorseful? I know he did what he had to, but I should be embarra**ed, outraged, something other than this stupid guilt.

"I," I fail to form words "I have to go."

I turn around, only to have someone hold my wrist.

"Come with me."

My head whips back, I stare wide-eyed at Ethan.

"What?" I ask, my voice high pitched with shock

He looks back at me, a steely glint of determination in his eyes.

"Luke is getting overly fond of you," he says "it's bound to cause problems— for both of you."

I s***** my wrist away from him, a spark of anger shoves aside the other emotions swirling in my head.

"This is between me and Luke, Ethan." I say, my voice dead of emotion
"Stay out of it."

“Elise, you don’t get it,” Ethan says “Luke isn’t safe to be around. He’s not stable.”

That spark of anger intensifies “Oh really? Do enlighten me, why so?”

Ethan opens his mouth to say something, closes it again, and works his jaw hard.

“It’s because he’s cursed?” I raised an eyebrow at him “Because he might turn into a beast and rip me into shreds?”

His eyes widen, I’m tempted to laugh. He did think I didn’t know that.

“Come on, Ethan,” I’m aware of the cruel note in my voice, he doesn’t deserve it, but he has no said in my life “One

the full moon has already pa**ed. You thought I wouldn’t know what I’m up against?”

“So you do know?” he says slowly, as if processing the words “And still you...”

I sigh. He thinks I’m some little girl in need of protection.

Protection from the man hellbent on keeping me safe.

I turn around, ready to go and fight down the turmoil of emotions in my head when I feel myself being sharply turned around. The cup slips from my hand and crashes on the floor, shattering in a thousand pieces.

“Why don’t you understand?” Ethan hisses, unfamiliar anger in his voice “You’re walking yourself into a death trap!”

“Ethan,” I say slowly, calmly “Let go of me.”

His hold on my arm tightens, I feel a dull sting on my skin “What is it about him that’s so special to you? Why can’t you see what he is?”

I grit my teeth together “Let go.”

He opens his mouth to spew out some crap again when someone rips him away from me. Luke’s holding Ethan by the shirt front, eyes narrowed in a glare.

“Didn’t I tell you to stay within your limits, Park?” He growls lowly

“Maybe you need a reminder of your own, Winters.” Ethan bites out

My mind comes in sharp focus, the tension in the air is almost palpable. Ethan’s immature behavior and my irritation aside, I really can’t have them fighting. Not right now. Not because of me.

“Luke,” I hold his arm, trying to pull it back “It’s fine, let’s just go.”

Luke glares at Ethan, then loosens his grip enough for Ethan to shove himself free of it. Luke takes my hand in his and looks down at our interlocked hands.

He freezes, his eyes glued down.

I see the tension that seeps in his frame, his hold on my hands tightens just a bit. Furrowing my brows, I look down.

To my absolute horror, a bruise glares at me where Ethan had grabbed my arm, the consequence of angry Lycans.

A low growl reaches my ears, the promise of outraged destruction makes my hairs stand.

This is not good. Not at all.

Alpha's Hunt by Starlight Chapter 40

Chapter 40 Bullet through my heart

Everything happens in slow motion then. I see Luke charge forward, Ethan's wide, horrified eyes glued to my arm,

Luke's hand pulls back and then his fist hits Ethan square in the face, blood gushes out of his nose.

My eyes fly to my mouth, holding back a gasp. My senses come back to me again.

Luke holds Ethan by the throat, slamming him against the wall. I see his feet dangling in the air.

"If you touch her again," Luke growls, his lips curled in a feral snarl "I will rip you apart, limb to limb."

He pulls his other arm back, pointed fingers fisted tightly. My eyes widen as I stare at him, petrified in place.

Ethan meets my eyes for a split second. I'm sorry, they seem to say. Luke's fist hits his face again. He doesn't retaliate. Oh, moon, Luke's going to kill him and Ethan's going to let him. Because of me.

"Stop!"

Luke's fist stops centimeters from Ethan's face. His eyes meet mine and instinct tells me to run as dark pools of stormy rage stare at me.

No, I tell myself, Luke wouldn't hurt me. I force my feet to move, reaching him almost carefully.

"Let him go," I raise my hand to lower his fist, he doesn't budge "Luke, please, this isn't you."

Luke keeps his gaze locked on mine for a moment, then I don't know what he sees on my face that makes his eyes clear, he drops his hands and steps away from Ethan.

Ethan collapses on the floor, breaking into a coughing fit. Big, ugly bruises on his pale neck. I almost step forward to help, but then stop. Now is not the time for this. I glance at Luke.

He looks away, his jaw clenched but his eyes aren't outraged anymore, just frustrated. To whom, I don't know.

Luke takes my hand in his with a gentleness I didn't imagine him to be capable of. We walk in silence towards our room. He guides me to the bed and I sit down as Luke shuffles through our bag.

He takes out a small gla** bottle and nods towards my arm. Without a word, I hold it out. Luke bends down on one knee and spreads the cool cream over the bruise. I sense the tension in his frame, his clenched jaw.

"Luke," I say softly, my hand already on its way to touch his cheek "I'm okay."

He lets out a breath, leaning into my palm, and looks up. I'm taken aback by the sole intensity of his gaze, a livid

storm in his blue eyes.

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“I’m going to kill him.”

“He didn’t mean it,” I say quietly, dropping my hand from his face

“His intentions may go to blazes for all I care,” Luke growls out lowly

He turns his eyes to the fading bruise on my arm, holds my hand in his own, his grip gently reassuring.

“This will never happen again,” Luke promises

Small smile tugs at my lips “You can’t protect me from everything, Luke.”

He looks up, his face is all angles of determination but his gaze softens when it meets mine as if staring at a precious treasure. He brushes my hair away, his warm hand slipping behind my neck. I feel the air around us shifting into something that makes my heart flutter madly.

“As long as I have breath in my lungs, I will protect you.”

His lips fall against my own.

Every sensible thought, every logic, every moral goes out of the window as my eyes flutter shut. What am I doing

What am I doing What am I doing?

My mind falls shut, my sense goes out of the window, but my heart beats hard, fast, overwhelmed as if giving me an answer.

What I want to, what I should’ve done long ago.

I feel Luke stand up, his knee forming a dip in the mattress against mine as he leans forward, his other arm slides around my waist, pulling me closer. In his arms is a strange sort of surety, a strange belonging in the way his lips move against mine.

Of their own volition, my hands slide into his hair and pull him down harder, letting out more emotions and frustration than I would ever admit.

Luke doesn't seem to care about that, a low growl rumbles through him to me as he tilts my face, deepening the kiss. The dire need for air makes me tug at his hair. Grudgingly, he let go of my mouth, but I can't catch my breath when

his lips start trailing my jaw, my neck.

My head is swimming with sensations I've never felt before as I drop my head back. His lips are a million degrees hot against my skin. I feel the remains of my breath hitch in my throat, his teeth scr*** my skin making a thrill of panic go through me.

Then his lips move, forming a searing word against my skin that slaps me right back into reality.

“Mine.”

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My eyes snap open, without thinking twice, I shove him away.

More from shock than from force, Luke stumbles away, his face flushed, pupils dilated. Silence descends on us, thick and heavy, only broken by my shallow breaths.

The realization of what just happened dawns on me. I sit still, wide eyes trained on the floor, unable to breathe.

What have I done ?

“Hazel,” A warm hand touches my cheek “Elise, I—

I flinch away from Luke, a flash of something raw and primal crosses his face, pain as if I’d just stabbed him.

I swallow thickly, my throat parched like sandpaper “T-This wasn’t, I didn’t mean to— I’m sorry.”

Words wither away on my tongue, my eyes dart in every direction, I feel them burn with tears of frustration, guilt, and hurt. Thoughts swarm in my head, each making me guiltier than the last.

I’ve been getting too comfortable with a man who’s not my mate. I let him kiss me. I kissed him back.

A part of me doesn’t regret it.

A familiar deep voice pulls me out of my thoughts;

“I’m not sorry.”

My head snaps towards him, my vision blurry but I see Luke move towards me. Slowly, quietly he settles down next to me. He takes my face in his hands, so carefully, as if I’m spun of gla**.

“I want you.”

I think I have a bullet through my heart.

“Luke, no.” I’m shaking my head

“I want to mark you.” He says, looking straight into my eyes, my soul “I want to live my whole life with you by my side.”

I wish I had a bullet through my heart.

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“I want you to be mine.”

I pull away from him and stumble back. I’m shocked, petrified, frozen in time by the wrongness of this hour, this moment.

“That’s not possible,” I find my voice, a mere whisper

“Why?” Luke closes the distance between us, his eyes searching my own

“Tell me the reason, the problem and I will fix it.”

My face crumples “This is against the law, against nature.”

I close my eyes and turn away from him. I want to shut him out, shut my heart out, shut my mind out, shut out everything in this whole universe. Benumb, simply exist and be teleported to a time when everything’s back to the way it should be.

Two familiar arms wrap around me from behind, holding me in an embrace that should not comfort me, but it does, it does and I hate it with every fiber of my being.

“Once I’m the Alpha Supreme, the law will bow to me,” Luke’s words caress my ear “Will you chose me then, Elise ?

If I make sure no one can take you away from me ?”

Some fragile barrier I'd put against the chaos in my head breaks. I turn around sharply in his hold, wrenching myself free of it.

“Can you change fate?” My words sound sharp to my ears “Can you fight the hate that will follow me to my grave after the filthy omega ‘traps’ the Alpha Supreme into being with her? Can you promise that when we stumble upon our true mates, we will not end up desiring them more?”

“Maybe you didn't think my words through, Elise. I want you, wholly, completely.” Luke says, his face set in stone, stormy eyes determined more than ever “And for you, I will do whatever it takes.”

He holds out a hand for me.

“Be my reason to fight, and let me be yours.”

He's standing three steps away from me but the distance is impossibly long. His eyes hold so much longing, so much hope it's cutting through me. To know that I can never close this distance, that I can never rest my head against his chest, run my hand through his hair or bare my heart to him because he's not mine and nor am I his, is like the strongest silver cuff holding me to the bottom of an ocean.

“I'm tired, Luke.” I whisper, the lies burn my tongue “I'm tired of fighting.”

The flash of unadulterated pain that crosses his face is forever burned in my memory. His fingers curl and he drops his hand, eyes firmly shut. When he opens them again, they're blank, hard as stone.

“Very well,” Luke's voice is the coldest, hardest metal that's ever ripped through my heart “I will not bother you again.”