

The Viking's Mate Hunt

Chapter 10 It's time

"Eir, her name is Eir."

It was the last thing I heard; I felt stupid. Like a stunned fool, but it took me a while to realize where I was. Without stretching it too far, it took me a while to remember who I was. An old lady had led me further into the little cottage like building, and a steaming hot wooden tub was waiting. I didn't protest as she started undressing me; it didn't feel like me at the moment. The water was so warm it burned by touch, but I soon adjusted, and my muscles slowly relaxed. A sweet and fresh scent filled the steaming air; it felt really lovely despite the circumstances.

I leaned back and closed my eyes as the older lady started to talk. Her voice was smooth and comfortable to listen to,

"First is the bath; we will clean you. So many smells we are not used to following you from the earth. Your hair and skin. Do you have those plastic things on your nails? What about lashes or in your hair?"

I just shook my head. I could never afford stuff like that; if I had the money to buy it, it also meant I could go to bed without my stomach aching in hunger. No. I never had the money for luxuries like that.

"Good, that will make the process faster since you arrived late and all. Then I'll take you over to Birgitta. She will comb and braid your hair before finding the dress that will fit you. You will be served food alone tonight, but tomorrow before you leave. You will all have breakfast together. I suggest you eat well."

The old lady may look like a typical kind granny from next door, but she was stern. The way she talked was rehearsed, and the way she mentioned that I was late, making them have to work faster, was said in a way making me feel like I did something wrong. I did not! Slowly a little flame ignited in my chest.

Why do I act like I gave up? I've been through so much worse than this! I never sit down and give up; that's just not me!

Be smart, Elisabeth! So, they are stronger, faster, and beasts.

“Why are they picking us up tomorrow?”

“For the mate hunt, dear! One more day away, and you would have missed it!”

“I’ve never heard of it..”

She sighed as she scrubbed my hair harshly with something thick and sweet smelling.

“You and nine other girls will be realized as the sun breaks tomorrow. Same dresses, same area, and you will all get about 10 hours head start. The hunt lasts for three days, and when it’s over, you have your mate!”

I furrowed; she sounded like this was supposed to be an honor. Like we weren’t forced to do this at all.

“What happens if nobody catches us before the three days are over?”

She laughed but meeting my stern face, she cleared her throat and continued like nothing.

“The rules say, if a girl manages to stay unclaimed all three days, she is free.”

I perked up,

“Free? So I could go home again?”

“Oh no, dear!”

She laughed a little.

“You would be free to choose your own mate. Now enough chit-chat, nobody has ever made it past day two. So put aside those silly thoughts girl and go get dressed.”

She was about to grab my clothes, but I scrambled them together in my arms before I left. She just shook her head and showed me the way.

“You won’t be wearing those, all-girl have the same white dress. That is tradition.”

Getting my hair braided was actually something I looked forward to, I’ve seen so many different hairstyles these last few days and they pretty much all have big or small braids. But I was a huge disappointment, she gave me two small

piggy tails. With those and that white dress, I swear they tried making me look like a little girl. I pulled them out, and the young girl was not happy.

We bickered, we argued, she tried cutting my hair and I threatened her with the same scissors. We met halfway. I got two braids, starting nearly at my forehead and all the way back, side by side. They ended up pretty neat, and it would help me keep my hair out of my eyes. I've decided to keep my head cool. I can handle this! Three days! I'm going to be the first!

The night was long, I tossed from side to side before darkness finally took over, but it felt like I just closed my eyes to the howling wolfs outside, and then someone shook my shoulder.

“Here is your dress. Wash up and get dressed, breakfast is ready!”

The old lady narrowed her eyes and looked at my head. Clearly displeased, but she didn't say a word. Left the white dress besides my bed with a bowl filled with water and then she left.

Another hot meal, I haven't eaten this well since that one year I was invited to a friend for dinner. A warm meal, meat, vegetables, water, juice, and fruits. It felt like a restaurant breakfast. I was tired but calm. I had a plan.

I recognized some of the girls that ate at the same table as me, but nobody said a word. The old lady came in clapping her hands asking us all to follow her, it was time!

By the door, we were met by 3 men, one of them Bo. I pretended I didn't see him, he didn't exist in my world and I wanted him to know it. my heart started pounding as we walked out, again, paraded like the cattle we were. The way through the village was filled with people now. All looking as we were headed through. In bare feet and a loose white dress. My breath got stuck in my throat as I noticed Luca. But clenching my jaw, I looked straight at him, and refused to acknowledge him.

The field where the men had changed into beasts the last day was cleared, and some sort of arena and fence was built around it. Only open towards the woods. We were lined up spread across the green grass, and suddenly they all turned quiet.

