

# The Viking's Mate Hunt

## Chapter 14 first checkpoint

Toke's POV.

The smoldering rage had calmed, and there was nothing to do but adjust and get ready. The alpha would not budge; the announcement was made, and taking it back would make him look weak.

It's not like him to take discussions like this without considering all the pros and cons, debating it with his second and third in command and the elders.

So why now? All because of a little rabbit with a bit of will of her own and quick feet? Reckless if you ask me, but of course, he did not.

My beast stirred under the surface, growling and pacing. He needed the title, and the excitement in the air had also infected him—nothing to do but make the best of it, so time to hunt down the runaway.

Not only did he allow all to participate, but he also made the hunt a whole day long. Like that would be necessary. I think he read well too much into the fact that she ran away; if they had managed to use their heads, they all would have. But instead, they bow their head, cry and beg. No matter why, this would end up being the hunt of the century, and I'm going to win it all.

Rune followed, hot on my heels, as I yanked open my door and started shifting. Most of the hunting we would spend as wolves, but I wanted my hunting attire. As I changed my dirty pants with a new pair, my mom, the Luna, came rushing in behind me. She was once like this girl, but I had trouble picturing her as scared and crying before running for her life. She was of few words, cold and strong—just the way she needed to be to survive here.

She pulled off my thick cape and, without a word, cut half my braid off. I winched but waited as she pulled the rest of it out, ruffling my hair. I was still seated in a tiny wooden chair I slumped down in after I pulled my pants up. She began to section it from the front and twist it with brown leather straps. Pulling it tight, making it all seem higher on the top of my head as she worked her way back.

“He smelled her; I don’t know what he found or why. But there is something he’s not telling about this girl. So, do not underestimate her! I expect you to come back with the price. It’s not an option to come back without, understood?”

“Yes.”

I knew very well what she meant, dad would die of shame, and if I wanted to stay in the pack, I would have to submit. Bring shame over my family and humiliate myself. Come back with the girl, or don’t come back at all. As simple as that.

“Good, go down to the arena and wait. The status will soon be updated; make sure to hear them all. Rune will follow me and come down with food for you later.”

With that, she gave my shoulder a squeeze; I knew she cared, her own way for me. I would never admit it, but some of the reasons I didn’t want these terrified girls was because of her. She was never mistreated, beaten, or starved; all girls were precious, after all. But the older I got, the clearer it became that she was never happy. Her eyes never smiled. The mate bond linked her today, pulled them towards each other, but she never loved him. Not of her own free will, sometimes I even suspected she hated him. Yet here I am, about to hunt down my prey. Drag her home and force her to a life in invisible captivity. The tradition lives on.

Jogging down to the arena, the place was already filled with people. Waiting.

It didn’t take long before the messenger came running up to the Alpha and whispered in his ears. He turned his attention to the rest of us, and all fell quiet. These updates could be essential, and every detail could be useful.

“ 8 girls already passed the first checkpoint.”

Cheers erupted around me, and I arched a brow before he raised his arms, and all sound died out.

“This is a good sign. They are fast and healthy this year! Nobody fell into the first fay trap either, so they are still all ours.”

That was the end of the message; even I had to admit, 8 out of 10 passing the first checkpoint this early was unusual. Maybe this year would be more fun

after all! We basked in the sun and relaxed in the green grass as we watched the sun move across the blue sky. Waited.

At the same time, I spotted Rune on his way over, the next messenger headed out of the woods, and I choked a smile as I saw him pick up his speed. Eager to hear the update. He threw the bag at me, keeping his eyes glued on the messenger whispering in the Alpha's ear.

"Did I miss anything?"

"Nah. Noting for the fay's and 8 passed the first checkpoint last time."

"Awesome, I hate those traps!"

The Fay traps, one between each checkpoint. We never allowed them to join our mate hunt, especially since the few girls being born are fay, and they shield them from the rest of the world. Why would we share? However, the traps are an ancient peace agreement. If a girl falls into one, she belongs to the fay court. It doesn't happen often, but I remember the year before I could attend for the first time, 4 out of 9 girls became fay court property. A sad year indeed.

"9 have now passed the first checkpoint and second checkpoint."

The Alpha's eyes found mine before he continued,

"It seems our runaway rabbit is missing or managing to run around the checkpoints."

Interesting, I can't remember that happening before. Maybe she at least will prove to be a little fun, if not a challenge after all.

"Still, all girls belong to us. Eat and rest, men! In one hour, the hunt opens, whether you are ready or not!"

Roars and howls rose to the sky, and even I joined in. The beast scratched inside my chest, eager to get out! To run, stalk and hunt.

This would be our year, after all!