

Chapter 30: Lucan

Chapter 30: Lucan

It hurt so much I bit my lip hard just to stop myself from screaming out of pain... and frustration.

This pain wasn't new. I'd felt it before.

Not this exact one but the kind that tries to convince you to stay down.

To stop fighting.

I've been surviving for as long as I can remember.

Even when I didn't have a reason to.

Back in my old pack, every day felt like walking through a storm barefoot. Treated like a cursed one. Trapped like I was in a prison.

There were nights I stared at the ceiling, wondering why I was still alive.

I had no answers then.

But now...

Now, I think I do.

Queen Selene's words echoed in my mind.

That I was a gift to my late mother. That she had prayed for me.

That my mother wanted me to live, that I was loved even if I never got the chance to remember it clearly.

Even if my last memories of her and my brother were just flashes of running... hiding... crying.

My father blamed me for their deaths. Told me it was my fault. Said I should've been the one who died.

But they died protecting me. They died saving me.

And so I can't—

No.

I won't waste this life.

I gritted my teeth and grabbed a branch beside me for support.

"Come on," I whispered, forcing air into my lungs. "You can do this."

I pushed myself upright, the weight on my injured ankle sending a jolt of pain through my entire body.

I gasped, clutching the branch tighter, but I didn't fall. Not this time.

Tears welled up, but I refused to let them spill.

I scanned the slope I had rolled down. My heart skipped when I spotted the black strap of the duffel bag caught beneath some brush a few feet away.

Limping slowly, dragging my leg behind me, I hobbled toward it.

Each step was agony.

But I made it.

I dropped to my knees beside the bag and unzipped it with shaking fingers, digging through clothes and supplies until I found what I was looking for.

A small white box.

The first aid kit.

I exhaled in relief.

Remember this, Elira. You can do this.

You're not just going to survive this life.

You're going to live it.

I opened the first aid kit, my fingers trembling.

Inside, everything was packed neatly.

Gauze, antiseptic wipes, bandages, a small ice pack, and even a roll of medical tape.

I blinked quickly, trying to focus through the pain.

First, I needed to see how bad it was.

I rolled up my pant leg slowly, sucking in a sharp breath when I saw the swelling around my ankle.

An angry and dark bruise had already started to bloom beneath the skin. It throbbed with every pulse of my heartbeat.

Okay... I exhaled. You've seen worse. You've handled worse, Elira. You can do this.

I tore open the cold pack, snapped the inner seal, and shook it hard.

It chilled instantly in my hand. With a hiss of pain, I pressed it gently to the swollen area.

Tears stung the corners of my eyes again, but I blinked them away.

"No crying," I muttered. "Not now."

Next, I cleaned the scrape on my knee, small compared to the ankle, but still bleeding.

I poured antiseptic over it. It burned. Badly.

But it made me feel alive.

I wrapped my ankle with gauze, tightening the bandage to keep it stable.

My hands weren't steady, and it took longer than I wanted, but when I was done, it looked secure.

Not perfect. But good enough.

I leaned back against the nearest tree and let out a long breath.

It wasn't over yet.

I still had to find that flag.

I sat still for a few more moments, letting the pain in my ankle dull to something bearable.

The cold pack was helping. The bandage was tight. It was enough to get me moving again.

I just need to reach the falls.

That was the landmark before the flag. If I could just get there, I'd know I wasn't completely lost.

With a groan, I pushed myself up. My balance wavered, but I planted my good foot firmly into the ground and grabbed a nearby tree trunk to steady myself.

Every step was a slow battle.

I took each step carefully, limping and dragging my injured leg behind me. The duffel bag hung heavy against my back.

My breathing turned shallow. My hair clung to my face, damp with sweat.

Keep going. Don't stop. Just one step at a time.

I whispered the words repeatedly like a prayer, like a spell to keep my body moving.

My ankle throbbed. My arms burned. My legs felt like they'd collapse if I stopped even once.

And then—

I heard it.

Faint, distant... but real.

Rushing water.

My head snapped up, and I turned toward the sound. It came deeper into the trees, past a thick wall of ferns and wild brush. My heart picked up speed.

"Yes..." I breathed, limping faster but careful this time.

The sound grew louder.

Clearer.

And then, through the parting trees—

There it was.

The waterfalls.

It was beautiful, tumbling over dark rocks into a clear pool below. Mist rose in the air like a soft curtain, catching sunlight through the gaps in the trees.

I nearly collapsed at the sight.

I stumbled forward until I reached the edge of the water. I fell to my knees, catching myself with both hands before I could fall in entirely.

I had made it.

Barely.

But I made it.

Tears burned in my eyes again, not from pain but from pride.

I cupped my hands in the cold stream and splashed the water against my face. The shock of it cleared my head.

I'm not done yet.

I took a shaky step forward, the spray of the waterfall misting my skin.

And then I saw it.

My breath caught in my throat.

There.

Across the water, partially hidden behind a boulder near the edge of the cliff, was a red flag.

Faint but unmistakable. It waved gently in the breeze, the bright fabric a stark contrast against the gray stone.

Even from here, I knew I wasn't imagining it.

I gasped, clutching the strap of the duffel bag tighter. "That's it," I whispered, my chest heaving with sudden hope.

A river stretched before me, and I wasn't sure how deep it ran. I could see the rocks beneath the surface, they looked slick and unforgiving. But the only way to reach the flag...

...was to cross it.

You've made it this far, Elira. You can do this.

Then—

A voice.

Low, taunting, almost amused.

"Do you even know how to swim?"

I froze.

"Or even if you can... can you do that with that foot of yours?"

My heart stuttered.

Slowly, I turned, eyes wide.

Someone leaned against a tree trunk just a few feet behind me, half-hidden in the shadows.

A long, dark cloak covered most of his body, the hood low over his head, but his voice was too calm and confident to belong to a stranger.

"W-who are you?" I asked, my voice trembling.

The man didn't move at first.

Then he straightened and, with one smooth motion, pulled his hood

back.

I stared.

Lucan.

Darius's brother. Queen Selene's third son.

We had met once, and I hadn't seen him since.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

Lucan shrugged. "Saw you nearly tumble into a death trap. Thought I'd check if my brother's wife had a death wish."

"I don't," I said firmly, though the pain in my ankle begged to differ.

He raised a brow, clearly amused. "Could've fooled me."

His gaze flicked toward the waterfall. "Trying to cross that with an injury? That's bold. Or stupid. Could go either way."

I straightened, ignoring the dull throb in my leg. "I c-can handle it."

Really? How, Elira?

He tilted his head slightly, studying me. "Still trying to prove something?"

I didn't answer.

"Let me guess..." His voice dropped, a little too knowing. "To Darius?"

I swallowed hard. "More like proving something to myself," I whispered.

Lucan didn't say anything right away.

He just looked at me.

Then, in one swift motion, he moved.

Before I could even blink or understand what he was about to do, his arm swept under my knees, the other around my back, and the ground vanished beneath me.

I gasped. "H-Hey—!"

But the world blurred.

It felt like the air bent around us, trees warping into streaks, water roaring past in a distorted hum.

My stomach dropped like I'd fallen from a great height, but before the fear could even settle—

Commented [Ma1]:

Commented [Ma2R1]:

We stopped.

Just like that.

Lucan's boots landed firmly on solid ground. My back was still frozen, arms instinctively clinging to his cloak.

I blinked.

We were on the other side.

The flag fluttered a few feet ahead, tucked behind the boulder exactly as I'd seen earlier, close enough to touch.

I was speechless.

Lucan slowly lowered me onto my good foot, one hand steadying my waist until I found my balance.

"T-Thank you—"

"Don't thank me," he said. "You're my brother's wife, our future Queen. You're part of this pack now, and I don't think you're as weak as they say. Because if you are, you wouldn't even make it this far."

He smirked, then nodded toward the flag. "Go on, grab it. Let them see how you passed this test."

I turned slowly, took a shaky breath, and stepped forward.

With trembling fingers, I reached out and grasped the fabric.

The red flag slid free from the boulder with a soft flutter.

I did it.

Even if I didn't reach it the way I planned... I made it.

When I turned back, Lucan was already walking toward me again.

"Wait, what are you—"

Before I could finish, he scooped me up once more.

The wind rushed past again, and in a blink, we were back where I'd started, on the opposite side.

Lucan set me down carefully, and I managed to stand alone, clutching the flag tightly in one hand.

He stepped back.

"This is where you finish it," he said.

Chapter 30: Lucan

5 bonus

And then, without another word, he turned and walked into the woods.

His voice carried one last time, laced with that familiar smirk.

"Try not to die before the real tests begin."

And just like that, he was gone.

Leaving me standing there aching, muddy, and breathless but victorious.

Another unexpected help from this pack...



Send Gifts



8 Likes