



## 19 19-I Can Survive This

Helanie:

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After I filled out the form while sitting behind the same tree as before, I walked back into the academy. Thankfully, the students were not around. I don't know why I felt so insecure under their gaze. They were so well-dressed and well-groomed, and here I was, wearing old clothes with large holes. I know I should be fortunate to at least have something to cover my body with, but it makes others bully me. 1

But that didn't mean the brothers weren't in the office. I was kind of hoping it was Emmet, but Maximus was sitting across the table, his head bowed over the papers before him.

"I filled out the form," I said after clearing my throat to get his attention. He acted like he wasn't the one who let me in after I knocked on the door.

"Tape it to my forehead," he pointed at his forehead without raising his head, his eyes focused on the files in front of him.



"Leave it here," he then raised his head and yelled at me in frustration, his eyes conveying disdain.

I placed the form down and gulped to moisten my throat. I guess he noticed and raised his head again, this time throwing the pen he was holding onto the file insolently while watching my face.

"What now?"

"Umm, where is the candidate shelter?" I asked, wondering if the others knew. Of course, they did. Many students come here with their parents and loved ones. They help them with the forms and even spend the day with them before bidding farewell.

It wasn't the same for me. I was literally walking into the academy with nothing but an old bag that contained two clothes.

"Why didn't your father come with you?" I don't know why he suddenly brought it up, but the mention of my father brought back memories of my stay in the pack.

It wasn't pleasant. Suddenly, I felt fingers on my body, the disgusting touch of the men.



I closed my eyes and hugged myself, shaking my head before taking a deep breath and then opening my eyes to respond to him.

However, of course, he was examining my face when I opened my eyes.

"I don't live with my father anymore," I replied more sternly.

But he remained silently watching my expression before he added, "Well, wait outside then. After I'm done with my work, I will head over to the candidate shelter to welcome new candidates."

I didn't expect him to personally walk me to the shelter, but since he offered, I nodded my head and left the office again.

I felt so lonely, doing everything on my own now. I sat behind the same tree, but this time, my face was turned toward the academy. I didn't want to miss him walking out because he was my only hope to the shelter now.

I sat cross-legged, playing with the wet grass in my hands. I was starving too. But looking around made me realize there weren't any fruit trees here. I should have picked some from around the



mansion. But my mother was in such a hurry to kick me out that I didn't get to take any food with me.

My eyes wandered off for a brief moment, and a distant memory flashed before my mind: the time my parents took me to school. I had changed schools when I turned four because some kids used to bully me at the old school. My parents took it very seriously.

They were ready to pay a hefty fee at the most expensive school for me. How did I go from being so loved to being so despised? And I didn't even do anything wrong.

I blinked away the tears when I saw Maximus head out of the academy. He briefly paused and looked around, raising his arms and stretching them. I quickly got to my feet and began briskly walking toward him. I didn't want him to leave without me.

It seemed like he was waiting and looking around for me because his search ended the moment his eyes landed on me.

I didn't realize how fast I was walking until I slipped on the wet grass, one leg going forward





while the other remained behind.

"Ouch!" The moment I grimaced, I fell silent and regained my posture. I didn't want to appear weak.

"Easy!" I heard, and I raised my head to find Maximus standing in front of me. He reached me so quickly.

"I am fine. I'm not hurt," I replied quickly, rubbing my hands on my dress to clean off whatever dirt I had gotten on it. I was pretty dirty at that moment.

"Wow, you are so strong," the sarcasm in his voice made me lower my gaze.

After an awkward silence, he turned, and we began making our way into the deep mountains.

I stayed close to him, trying my best to keep up with his long strides. It was so easy for him to navigate around the large trees or walk over the small stream of water, while I had to jump due to having shorter legs than him.

After about ten minutes of walking, we finally arrived at a cabin-style house. The wooden



boards creaked as he stepped onto the stairs while I remained behind on the ground.

There were other students who had already arrived with their families. I watched them being loved and hugged by their parents and siblings, carrying bags full of their necessities.

I suddenly felt so lonely and miserable. I had no one by my side, and I wasn't the only one who noticed it. The parents of the other candidates also cast glances at me before refocusing on their children.

"I hope your journeys were comfortable. You are leaving your kids in secure hands. After a week of tests and examinations, you will be informed of the results. Now! I'm giving you all ten minutes to say your goodbyes before this door opens," Maximus said, his commanding and serious tone referring to his students.

I took a deep breath and then lowered my head.

The ten minutes felt so long to pass.

But finally, the parents and other family members of the candidates started leaving, and we were now facing Maximus standing on the





front porch of the cabin that they called a Candidate Shelter.

"Today is designated as a rest day for you all. You don't have to cook or do anything for a week. We will provide you with food, but starting next week, as the tests begin, you will be hunting down your own meals. This academy is not for the faint of heart--" his eyes briefly lingered on me, and I swear others turned their heads to look at me as well before focusing on him again. "I hope whoever gets accepted deserves a place in this academy."

As he finished, I watched everyone give each other a nod as a gesture of good luck. Nobody did that for me. I guessed that was because I looked different from them. No fancy clothes or accessories on me; in fact, I looked like I had come from prison.

But the real test was to survive and pass these challenges, which I was more than ready for.