

## Hunted

(Short Story from *Alien Interludes: Clans of Kalquor Short Stories*)

Amelia swallowed a knot of panic as she hurried through the forest. Her heart pounded harder than her pace warranted. She navigated the woods as quickly as possible, but with care. She had a two-hour head start on her pursuer, but when stalked by a Nobek, two hours wasn't much of a buffer.

She'd roamed these Kalquorian woods on innumerable occasions with her three mates and the clan's twins. She loved the patchwork quilt of jewel-toned leaves of the trees, the springy terrain that cushioned her feet, the cheerful songs of the reptilian drills that nested high in the trees.

Not today. She was on her own and running from a cunning and ruthless hunter. She knew his savagery, understood him for the predator he was.

Her Imdiko mate Flencik, as big as he was gentle, had warned her only this morning, "Nobeks are set off by prey in flight. Never let them see you running away. It brings all their primal instincts to the fore. Stand your ground. Fight. Believe it or not, you're less likely to get hurt."

The leader of their clan Rajhir had added, "Swinging big sticks or throwing heavy rocks would help. Or maybe it would just make him mad."

Her mates were miles distant, having taken the twins to the pink-sanded beach close to their home. No doubt laughing at the babies' cheerful antics while Amelia dashed through the woods with a stalking brute on her trail.

Amelia heard the rushing water of the stream ahead and felt a rush of triumph. Almost there. The next moment she saw it, a glittering ribbon through the leaf-strewn earth, winding from the distant mountains.

She ran now, pushing her long auburn hair behind her ears and wishing she had put the thick waves in a ponytail. The mass kept falling forward to blind her. A hat would have been helpful too. Her hair color must be a beacon. She wore muted clothing, but her tresses would be blatant among the blue-gray barked trees. Stupid. How many other details had she forgotten, details that would lead her pursuer straight to her? At least she'd had the sense to wear a blouse and short hiking skirt that were light and easy to move in.

Amelia reached the stream and pulled off her tan soft-soled slippers. She waded in, catching her breath. The water was biting cold, but it would mask her scent. The man on her trail had a remarkable sense of smell, as good as, if not better than, an Earth bloodhound.

How far ahead of him was she? Kalquorians were inhumanly quick. At a full run, they turned into a blur, too fast for human vision to follow. What had taken her two hours to traverse, her pursuer would cover in minutes. The only thing slowing him down was having to search for clues of her passage, clues she'd trained hard to eliminate.

Amelia was in the best shape of her life. Rigorous workouts, supervised by her third clanmate Braft, had increased her endurance and strength. Her soft curves hadn't all disappeared as she'd feared they might. Her figure remained hourglass, with swelling breasts and hips. But her belly was flat and her long legs sturdy and lean. Judging from the increased sexual activity in the past weeks, her clan was as delighted with her shape as she was.

Amelia had gone beyond physical training too. She'd studied how to track fugitives, determined to make as few mistakes as possible. Then she'd mapped out her course of escape, going over her route again and again until she could have followed it with her eyes closed.

For all her preparations, she was terribly outmatched. The man who chased her was an officer in the elite Global Security that ensured Kalquor's domestic protection. He was one of the most dangerous of the warrior Nobek breed and an expert hunter. Ruthless and brutal, he would never stop, never rest, never quit until he'd caught her.

After a few minutes of slogging through the icy knee-deep stream, Amelia climbed up the rocky bank, leaving wet footprints as she took a few steps towards the tree line. She stopped and reversed her course, stepping carefully into the prints she'd left. She tried to ignore the precious minutes lost in her attempt to throw her pursuer off the trail. Every second, he closed in on her, nearing the inevitable end.

He'd catch her. There was no doubt on that score. But she wouldn't give up until that happened.

Amelia returned to the water, racing as fast as the dragging current allowed. Her toes cramped in the cold, slowing her down. She cursed herself for forgetting the winter thaw. The ice-capped mountains in the north fed the rivers and streams, and the miscalculation would cost her time. At least the streambed was sandy, giving her plenty of traction. Falling into the frigid water and soaking her clothes would be a nightmare.

Five minutes later, she spotted a grassy meadow bordered by the thick-trunked ytasos trees. She sloshed towards the gray barked trees that dripped seed pods as tall as she was.

Her feet were nearly numb when she stepped up on the shore. Amelia made herself walk on her reddened toes, leaving as little crushed grass in her wake as possible. As soon as she reached the tree line, she put her slippers on. Here, spiny roots stabbed up in daggers out of the earth.

The earth was harder packed and left few traces of her passage. She picked over the roots, careful to avoid breaking any. The going got harder as she pressed further into the growth, the roots covering most of the ground's surface.

A splash from the stream froze Amelia in her tracks. She slowly turned, certain she'd see her pursuer, his dark face spread in a predatory snarl, his fangs flashing in anticipation of the kill. Her breath stilled as she peered back the way she'd come.

The ytasos trees blocked her sight of the ribbon of water. No man, no movement. Her ears strained to hear anything above the sound of the rushing stream. Nothing. Perhaps the splash had been a water animal or fish. Maybe.

Amelia set off for the Dagoonda Plain. Rattled, she hurried, breaking more roots than she should, a definite roadmap for the chasing Nobek to follow. The need to put distance between them drove her close to panic.

A snap of a root in the distance behind her brought her to a halt once more. Her breath screaming in her ears, she scanned the forest for pursuit. Nothing stirred. There wasn't even a breeze to rock the seed pods overhead. But Amelia was certain she was being watched.

*Never run from a Nobek. It's the worst possible thing you can do.*

Ignoring every instinct that pushed her to race headlong in flight, Amelia forced herself to walk with a quick, steady pace. If he followed her, he'd at least not come at her with fangs bared and mindless intent. She hoped.

Amelia ventured through the forest, listening hard. Once in a while, she thought she heard a footfall or the snap of a root. Her heart pounded. If it was him, he was deliberately making noise. Her pursuer was versed in the art of silent tracking.

He wanted her to lose her nerve and run.

She forced herself to breathe evenly, though her pulse galloped like a frenzied racehorse. She didn't know for sure he was there. She might only be hearing things in her growing terror,

imagining the feeling of piercing purple eyes, their cat-slitted pupils narrowing as they watched her.

The ytasos were thinning out, giving way to the regional deciduous growth again. Ytasos were predatory foliage from another world that destroyed Kalquor's forests if allowed to gain a foothold. If Amelia reached home in one piece, she'd have to alert natural resource authorities about this stand.

At the border between the native trees and ytasos, she paused. The forest before her was more welcoming with its canopy of red, blue, orange, green and yellow leaves. The blue-gray bark of the trees was smooth. The soil, carpeted by fallen leaves and free of ytasos roots, was soft. The lovely beckoning of the treescape was a false promise, however. If her pursuer was behind her, he'd take her in these woods. She knew exactly what would happen then.

She knew because he'd once whispered his threats as he pinned her helpless against a wall.

*"I would like to set you free in the forest and let you run from me. I would like to hunt you like prey, to follow your scent, to sense your fear as I draw close. I will chase you down, throw you to the ground..."*

She made herself stop hearing the growling voice in her mind. It threatened to overwhelm her. Her legs were shaking, and she had the urge to sink to the earth and give up.

Amelia swallowed and looked about. Nothing moved. No sign of pursuit. She didn't trust it.

There was nothing to do but continue on and hope for the best. She entered the cool forest, the castoff leaves rustling under her feet. The going was much easier, but she left subtle traces of her passage, traces the Nobek would follow easily. She needed to hurry.

Amelia broke into a trot. She trekked upward, the incline slight but enough to make her calves burn with the effort. The forest slid by, and she thought she just might make the harder-to-track terrain of the Dagoonda Plain after all.

A growl rolled through the silent wood, a heart-shattering bestial noise that no intelligent being should utter. It rumbled in her bones.

He'd found her.

All sense, everything she'd been taught, was erased by that monstrous, feral sound. Terror flooded Amelia's mind, and she ran as fast as her legs could carry her.

The trees flew past now, but she had no time to be impressed with her own speed as a full-throated roar blasted through the air. Amelia dared to glance over her shoulder.

He came at her so fast, he was nothing but a dark blur against the sun-dappled backdrop of the forest. Amelia didn't have a chance to scream before he was on her, taking her down to the leaf-cushioned earth.

The Kalquorian, his instincts raised by the chase, was a terrifying sight as he pinned her. He was all chiseled muscle. His remarkable physique was clad in a sleeveless black formsuit that showed him off to advantage. His skin was dark, similar to the people of Earth's Middle East. Waves of jet-black hair tumbled forward as he bent close, his breath warm on her face. The sharp planes of his features were softened by his mustache and goatee, but there was nothing but predator in his purple cat's eyes. He opened his mouth, and Amelia's breath caught. Thin, hinged fangs descended from his palate.

His hands were vises on her wrists, and she struggled despite the futility of it. He lowered his hips onto hers, his weight holding her down, keeping her frantic kicks from connecting. His hard masculinity pressing on her sex, telling her what would happen next. Her breath sobbed in and out as his intent face closed in on hers.

“You were better at evading me than I thought you’d be,” he snarled. “You’ve been planning this a long time, haven’t you? I’m impressed, little one.”

He shifted, and Amelia saw an opening. She darted forward and sank her teeth into the side of his neck. Hot, sweet blood spilled into her mouth, and he howled. His thumbs dug painfully into her wrists, and she released the bite with a scream as sharp agony sizzled through her fingertips.

“You’ll pay for that.” He ripped the front of her blouse open, exposing her breasts. Already ample, they were swollen from the milk they made for the twins. The attacker growled at the sight. His needle-sharp fangs stabbed a mound.

“Ow, Breft!” she yelled at her Nobek clanmate. She yanked in futility against his iron grasp on her wrists.

He squirmed, pushing her legs apart with his muscular thighs. Euphoria coursed through her, brought about by the intoxicant that flowed from his bite. She moaned as her sex caught fire.

As soon as Breft had filled her with warm pleasure, he drew back. He licked her blood from his lips.

“Animal,” she purred, gazing into the predatory face. He hadn’t intoxicated her much, but her brain buzzed pleasantly.

“Indeed,” he smirked, savagery lurking at the edges of his expression. Her pussy tightened with anticipation. “Exactly the way you wish, my sweet Matara. When Rajhir and Flencik told me this morning I was going hunting, I knew how savage you’d want me when I caught you.”

To prove his point, he released her wrists to tear her skirt off and shred the thin panties beneath. Amelia cried out in mingled terror and excitement at the display of brute strength. She lay vulnerable beneath him. Knowing he would show no mercy only thrilled her more.

Breft sat on her belly, keeping most of his weight off her. He might hurt her a little, but only for the cause of greater pleasure. She wriggled beneath him and pummeled his chest with her fists, pounding against his granite flesh. The chase was a gift to her fierce mate, and he’d be disappointed with only token resistance.

As if she wasn’t raining blows at all, Breft casually unshouldered the pack he wore and rummaged inside. Amelia stopped beating on him. “What’s in there?”

His grin was pure devilry as he yanked out several lengths of cord. “Be a good girl and hand me your wrists.”

Tied down. Amelia’s anxiety tickled despite the intoxication. He’d never mentioned this as part of his hunting fantasy. “Surely my big, bad Nobek can overcome an Earther girl’s defenses?”

“Easily. But I want you completely helpless. Mine to play with as I like. Wrists, Amelia.” His blue-purple gaze bore into her. “Now.”

Even as she thought of resistance, she automatically obeyed his command. In less than a breath, he had her wrists bound together. He sprang from her to lash the other end of the cord to a nearby tree. A moment later he returned, tying cords to her ankles.

“Breft?” Her voice was high pitched, but she couldn’t help it. She trusted him, but she knew better than to take him lightly.

“Just a moment. I almost have you prepared for the kill.”

He ignored her whimper and tied the cords to two nearby trees, opening her legs wide. Breft looked down at her splayed body, the bulge of his crotch straining his formsuit to its stretchy limits. “Lovely. I’ll claim my prize now.”

He stripped off his boots and formsuit. Amelia groaned to see him nude. His two penises, glistening from the lubricant they exuded, jutted at right angles from his groin. She went wet herself.

Breft knelt between her legs, his gaze sweeping over her vulnerable body. A bestial growl erupted from his chest. Amelia's heart flip-flopped, and she pulled at her bonds. There was no give. If Breft lost control...

He crouched over her, bringing his face close to hers. His breath wafted warm, coming in low growls. She closed her eyes against the intensity of his stare.

His mouth crushed hers, his tongue invading. The kiss was brutal, uncompromising in its demands as he plundered. His rough tongue twined about its twin. She moaned, thoroughly tasted and possessed.

He kissed down her chin and throat, his soft mustache and goatee tickling her on the way down. She squirmed in reaction, especially when his mouth landed on the hollow of her throat. She giggled helplessly, then squealed when his teeth scraped her skin. "Stop!"

He growled in response and continued downward. When his hand and mouth closed over her breasts, Amelia arched with a cry. Sensation was a bright electrical blast traveling straight to her sex.

Breft mauled her, sucking flesh as deeply into his maw as he could, clutching hard to bring pain to the other breast. Amelia writhed as much as her bonds would allow, at once tortured and delighted by his rough attention. Her moans carried in the forest, punctuated by an occasional snarl from Breft.

He pinched an engorged nipple and gently bit the other. Excitement bolted to her wet pussy. Breft sat up to slap the jiggling mounds from side to side, turning her pale skin pink. He spanked her breasts, occasionally stopping to tweak the reddened peaks. Amelia sobbed with agonized desire as he demonstrated his mastery over her.

With a lingering kiss on each throbbing breast, his mouth moved down her torso, tasting her as he neared her aching mound. Breft paused to tease her navel with the tip of his tongue. His fingertips drew light circles on her spread inner thighs, venturing closer and closer to her hungry sex. Amelia shuddered to feel his touch so near. She thrust her hips as much as her bonds allowed.

Breft sat back to inspect her open slit. He stroked the auburn swirls of her pubic hair, as if petting a cat. God help her, he was so close to where she ached. If only he'd touch her. She keened her need.

His grin was savage. "So pretty, my Matara. Such a soft, eager pussy you have, all for me to play with. Whatever shall I do first with this lovely prize?"

Amelia groaned. It would do no good to beg. He meant to torture her, and there was nothing she could do about it. She fell into the warm embrace of perfect submission and waited for his first tormenting stroke.

He sensed her surrender. "Good girl." His gaze darkened with pleasure. His finger traced the folds of her labia, spreading thick wetness over the sensitive flesh. She shuddered as he drew her honey over her clit and continued down the other side of her pussy lips. Down, down further until he reached her tighter entrance. He drew a circle of fluid around her most secret of openings. She flexed at the sensation.

He brought his attention to her sex once more, rubbing the warming folds. Breft plunged two fingers inside her. She arched with a scream at the sudden taking. He pounded in and out several

times before slowing. When he thrust deep, the heel of his hand found her clit, and he rubbed in a circle before pulling nearly free.

He finger-fucked her slow with that intermittent friction on her straining clit. Then another round of lightning-quick hammering. The aching torture seemed to go on forever until she burst a frantic plea, "Please Breft, please Breft, pleasepleaseplease..."

"Come now, Amelia." His lips closed on her clit, and he sucked hard while his fingers beat faster within her. A starburst of ecstasy went supernova, and she blasted into white-hot shards. Later, she'd be grateful Breft had tied her down; otherwise, she might have fled Kalquor's gravity from orgasm's force.

She floated lazily to her body after an eternity of pulsing bliss. Breft was waiting for her when she landed, kneeling between her splayed legs with a bright grin and huge erections. "Welcome back."

Amelia's throat ached. She must have screamed for ages. From the looks of her mate, she'd scream more before he was finished with her. "You nearly killed me."

"Poor Amelia," he crooned, but there was no sympathy in his expression. He stared at her with flat, greedy hunger.

He stretched over her, bringing the velvety steel of his erections to where, ready or not, she'd have to take him. She moaned as the tapered points of his bullet-shaped organs slide a little way inside her.

Breft suddenly drove hard, burying his shafts with a single, powerful thrust. Amelia screamed as he impaled her, pain and pleasure exploding.

He growled as his hips took up a determined rhythm. He fed her flesh with his, rutting her. Amelia moaned as the carnal blaze grew, lighting her with fierce heat. Her Nobek knew every inch of her, knew what to do to make her burn with need for him.

Breft rose to his knees, grabbed her hips, and jackhammered into her. The sudden change in pace and position raised bird-like cries from her as he found new places to stimulate. Her pussy grabbed at him. He growled and slowed again. Amelia whimpered and twisted in her bonds, wishing she could snatch control. She was eager to overcome Breft and make him suffer.

"Mine to play with." He ground his hips against hers in little circles until he found the sweet spot that brought electric thrills coursing through her. Galvanized by the rush of elation, Amelia went stiff all over.

"There you are," he grinned, triumph suffusing his tone. With vicious determination, he angled himself so that he slid slowly over that nest of nerves with every thrust.

Amelia quaked beneath him. He brought her to the brink of annihilation, then stilled until she calmed enough for another agonizing stroke. She jerked at the cords holding her helpless, needing to get free so she could move against him and claim the ecstasy that beckoned just out of reach.

"Please," she begged.

He pressed against that spot again, and orgasm started, warming her insides, digging into her with ticklish claws...

Breft stilled. Amelia hovered for an instant before the bright sensation receded once more. "Nooooo..."

He pinched her stiff nipple and slid his rough tongue across her lips. "You nearly had it, didn't you?"

"Damn you," she snarled, desperation overriding sense. "Stop teasing me!"

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” Breft tried for innocence, an expression unsuited for his predator’s face. Amelia doubted he’d ever been innocent. He’d probably emerged from the womb ready to fuck and fight.

He slid over that spot again, and once more she came close...so close. When he refused to allow her release, her scream of rage blasted the woods.

“Hateful bastard! Cold-blooded, dominating, vile thug!”

A smirk tugged at his lips. “But you love me anyway.”

She unleashed another furious shriek. He brought her close to climax once more. Again, she trembled on the brink. Again, he denied her.

She sobbed, hating her helplessness. Why had she agreed to this? What had possessed her to offer herself to him so completely, knowing he’d torment her beyond endurance?

He kissed her tears away. “Enough. I’ll give you what you want.”

Two quick thrusts, and Amelia soared up and over the precipice at last, screaming with abandon as rapture erupted. After a few moments, Breft’s ear-shattering roar joined her cries. He spasmed deep within her as he surrendered to ecstasy. His muscles corded as his seed pulsed from his body to hers.

Afterward, Breft kissed her gently before rising to untie her. Once she was free, he cuddled her to his chest and sat with his back propped against a tree. “That was the perfect present. We’ll have to adopt this Earther custom of anniversary celebrations here on Kalquor. I’ll have Rajhir bring it up at the next council session.”

Amelia giggled, tracing his strong jaw. “Was it as good as your fantasy?”

“Better.” He grinned, no trace of hunting instinct in his expression. “I can’t believe I didn’t figure out what you were up to. Getting me to help you work out to lose the baby weight! All along, I was preparing you to run away from me.” His smile was fit to split his handsome face. “You had me fooled.”

“I bet that’s the only time anyone ever got over on you.”

“You must have been plotting a long while. You did very well with covering your tracks and setting up false trails. I had to backtrack twice. You’re cunning prey.”

“Flatterer.” She glowed under his praise, though she doubted he’d had any trouble following her. Breft was an expert tracker.

“I don’t lie, my love.” He kissed her and held her tighter than ever.

She sighed, warm and safe in his strong arms. Amelia closed her eyes, thrilled to have made him happy.

“You realize, it’s going to be a tough year ahead,” he said.

She looked up at him, concerned at how his brows drew together. “Why do you say that?”

“Because you’ve never been mountain climbing before, and it’ll take a lot of training for my next fantasy—”

Amelia punched his chest.