

Chapter 106

Within a minute, the proditors were before the very person they'd only heard about and never wanted to meet. Their empress's scowl had some of them fidgeting when she uttered, "The fact that any of you tried to run is deeply, deeply insulting." She entered their minds all at once, took out the most fearful thing in their mental archive and manipulated them to see it in its full force for a moment before the proditors each paled, shuddered, and - one by one - they dropped unconscious.

Lucy turned back to her hostages, she questioned, "The thugs - where are they running to?"

"Six miles north, Your Majesty," they disclosed in unison.

Upon hearing that, Millicent raced back in the direction of their vehicles as she yelled, "Thank you, Your Majesty!"

On the ground, as soon as his cousin and cousin-in-law entered the field, Greg allowed his weakened state to be revealed, and it wasn't looking good with his inability to push himself up and an exhaustion so great that he was fighting to keep his eyes open as his hearing began receiving muffled sounds instead of clear words and voices. The gray on his body reflected the contamination of his blood, and the only thing guiding him was his sense of smell, allowing him to lean closer to the source of the scent of frangipanis and limes that made his suffering less tormenting.

Sush guided him to lay his head on her lap, and a doctor and two nurses - who arrived with the rest of the medical team - got the bullets out from Greg's body and worked on the blood transfusion while another nurse tended to Sush's injuries. Sush's hands stayed on Greg's shoulders, shaking him every time his eyes were nearing to a close, but her sights kept flickering to the gray lines-turn-patches on his body that felt like they were strangling and suffocating her, forcing a layer of moisture to

glaze her eyes.

How could the shield she created not be big enough to cover him completely?

She watched the medical personnel work and even asked whether Greg was going to be okay, whether they brought enough blood, whether they should do this in a more sanitary location in case he gets an infection. The nurses and doctor answered every single question patiently, calmly, hoping to calm her too.

Only when Greg looked less dazed, the gray began fading, and the lines started receding did Sush release the breath she'd been holding onto and allowed her lungs to replenish themselves, muffling out a sob that escaped her lips, and letting the tears of relief fall into Greg's hair. Her arms wrapped around his shoulders in nothing short of immense gratitude for whatever power - probably the power of medicine - that didn't let his life slip away when they'd just found each other.

With his returning strength, Greg's unaffected hand reached for her arm, stroking it reassuringly, affectionately, pressing a kiss there. He could sit like this in the dirt forever if it meant his head was resting on her lap, with her arms wrapped around his shoulders like they were now. Sure, the receding numbness was a little uncomfortable and there may be more than a few bugs on the ground that were crawling up his skin then back down, but other than that, he'd never felt better.

The moment he heard Millicent thanking the queen for the location that probably hid another Robinson hideout, he gave Sush's arm a gentle squeeze, then tried to push himself up.

Since Greg hadn't gotten back enough strength yet, he was pressed back down by his octopus, whose teary eyes were now raging.

Before she got a word out, he calmly explained, "There's no better time to get your mother's killers than now, before the justice system and the whole defense circus gets involved. Go."

"I'm not going anywhere," she insisted in a hushed whisper, adamantly

holding him down, and was thankful that he was still too weak to fight back.

The gray was still on his body, the lines - though ebbing - were still visible. The color of his face hadn't fully returned. A partial recovery was not going to make her leave. She wanted to see every bit of intrusive color leave his skin before she'd let him leave her lap, and she was going to witness him stand and walk at least thirty steps before even considering looking - let alone going - somewhere else.

Befuddled, his brows furrowed when he reminded, "Sush, this is your chance. You've been waiting for this for more than a decade."

Her brain understood what he meant, but the yearning in her heart and soul to see him heal completely overpowered her need to draw blood. Hazel, Mrs. Robinson, and the escaped thugs could wait. There was something more crucial that she wanted to see through, something more important than revenge.

The rage left her eyes, her lips welcomed the softest smile as her thumb brushed across his bare skin in repeated motions when she whispered, "I wonder what changed."

Her declaration said more than anyone else knew, even more than she or Greg knew.

As her need for revenge no longer took the dominant spot in her being, the emotional block that was there disintegrated, and the mate-bond from her end snapped into place, lining with Greg as he felt the sparks channeled through their touch at an intensity that made his animal howled like it had just discovered a gold mine.

Sush felt something, too. A small spark, like stars glittering over her skin. She didn't know what it was, but it came right after her one-liner. It was as if her soul was being pulled into a safe haven, and she speculated whether this was how a human felt a mate-bond - mild but present, noticeable when focused on.

Her question was answered when Greg's brightening eyes met hers,

and the happiest smile stretched his lips when he uttered, "Mate."

As her lips at his temple curled into a smile, she whispered, "You don't really have a choice in that anymore, Greg. Not since that night on the balcony."

He chuckled lightly. "We're going to be stuck together for a very long time," he purred, drawing out a bigger smile from her, one that liquefied his heart.

Sush hadn't known yet that humans didn't feel a mate-bond, that she only felt the glittering stars because hunters - with the awakened power - could now mildly detect and feel the connection.

"Hi, sorry to interrupt," Lucy came, Pelly and Xandar by her side. "Sush, this is Pelly, and she's saying that she can get the Forest of Oderem to haul the shelter up north back here within seconds. We understand this is the hunters' jurisdiction and teams have already been deployed, but would you like her to sort of... help shorten the travel distance?"

Woah, woah, woah. That was way too much information to process, even for Sush, whose eyes had bulged wide.

First off, Pelly? Sush was fine if the empress was introduced as the empress. And shouldn't the empress appear a little less... friendly?

Second, the Forest of What-derem?

Third, it could... haul a hideout?

And she thought her weapon-manufacturing from nature's pieces was great.

In the silence, Greg turned to Lucy to utter, "It's an honor for my presence to be acknowledged, my queen. And I'm recovering quite well, thank you for asking."

It was harmless sarcasm that they mutually understood, seeing that Lucy neither acknowledged him nor asked how he was to begin with, thus pulling Lucy's narrowed eyes to him. "I know you're not pretending this time, Greg, but you are clearly recovering with new blood and a

second-chance mate. The ones who tried to kill you and her are now taking priority over your presence." Attention back on Sush, she added in all sincerity, "We won't do anything if you prefer us not to, Sush. You don't have to say yes."

Sush's mouth gaped, her mind going to a million places before she ultimately parroted, "H-haul the shelter..." It sounded bizarre even when she said it. She expected someone to correct her, to tell her she misheard and repeat what was actually said. When they didn't, she simply uttered, "S-sure, let's go with that."

Sush had no idea what she'd just agreed to, and waited as Lucy and Pelly turned toward the targeted direction and Pelly's eyes glowed in bright, emerald green.

Nothing seemed to be happening yet, so Sush closed in on Greg's ear and whispered, "The forest of what again?"

"Oderem." He pushed himself up when he could feel all of his limbs and went on, "Temperamental forest from the vampire territory that casts voodooos, gives neck tattoos, and takes insults and insinuations very personally so don't say anything offensive when it gets here."

Sush was certain fatigue was getting to her head and she was hearing everything wrong, so she replayed what she thought she heard - though still not making sense of anything - while helping him onto his feet, staying nearby and reluctantly releasing her hands when the doctors said they wanted to see the duke moving about on his own.

He was fine, and Sush felt a huge weight being lifted off her shoulders seeing him move about as he normally did before he impatiently argued with the doctor in a low murmur about the extended reflex tests they wanted to conduct, which Greg personally found unnecessary.

Distant shouts, curses, screams, and something heavy being dragged back pulled everyone's sights to the source, and the first impression that the Forest of Oderem gave most hunters was that it loved making an entrance.