

Chapter 113

In the following week after returning from the kingdom, a paternity test was taken, and it confirmed Sush carried Ferdinand's genes - a fact that didn't surprise him but disgusted her. Of all the things she imagined her birth father to be, a defense minister that was the epitome of an irresponsible, disloyal, and unreliable hypocrite was not one of them.

Upon learning this, Sush sat on the couch and stared into space.

Greg came over soon after, placed her on his lap and asked whether she wanted to talk things through; preferred if he just held her and stayed silent; or simply wanted to be left alone so he should leave for now. At the mention of the last option, Sush grabbed onto his shirt - her action conveying that she did not want him to leave before her words did. She asked for the second option, and a very quiet stretch of two hours followed as she sorted through who her parents were.

She admitted she didn't fully know either of them, and perhaps never will. She sure wasn't interested in getting to know her biological father, but where did that leave her?

At that mental juncture, something Greg said from before played in her mind - about who her parents were having no bearing on who she was. She took a walk down memory lane - retrieving memories of being brought up by her uncle and aunt who loved her like she was their own; having worked her ass off in school and beaten all odds to complete her education; and having made memories with the people she loved or respected. She thought about the challenges she'd overcome - in her work and in life - most of the time with nothing more than sheer fucking will. There were bad days - lots of them, in fact - but even those storms passed. She weathered every single one. Sometimes with support,

sometimes without.

She thought about how far she'd come, from being orphaned to being a scholar, then an engineer, a huntress, a chief. She'd come far, and none of that had anything to do with the origins of her genes. She had something she was proud of, something she created - herself.

When her mental process came to an end, Greg was still holding her in his embrace and stroking her arm, neither bored nor frustrated. His emotions exuded patience with a tinge of concern, and a sliver of anxiety that he was trying very hard to keep to himself.

She left a kiss on his cheek, thanking him for doing this - for being there for her the way that she needed him to. As his lips curled up, he murmured, "You needn't thank me for doing the bare minimum, my octopus. Thank you for telling me what you need."

Having processed the thoughts and emotions, she felt better - clear, emotionally stable, and at peace - ready to take on her new role amongst the hunters. And then came the drizzle before a quick-abating storm.

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Questions of nepotism arose when it was reported that Sush had been sworn in as the new commander the moment charges against Valor were pursued, resulting in him losing the majority support of the hunters. However, such skepticisms were significantly reduced when many hunters - both on the job and several retirees - released independent statements and social media posts disclosing how Sush had been contributing in the background for longer than anyone they knew and almost died on several occasions in her years of service. Some went so far as to disclose that Ferdinand had always voted against her when it came to appointments and recommendations.

The months of trial that followed in human territory garnered universal

attention and many watched it live from wherever they lived. Some willingly woke up at ungodly hours just to see Ferdinand, Valor, and the Robinsons testify next to a potted plant of transparent-petaled flowers. Memes surfaced and circulated labeling the flowers as the MVP of the courtroom saga.

It became something akin to a hit limited series on television, and the hunters tuned in to the daily episode like loyal fans. Patterson and Kenji chipped in to have large-screen TVs installed in their now-shared cafeteria in the newly-built hunters headquarters. Everyone rushed for the best seats and watched it at lunch hour, either cheering or booing at testimonies like they were watching a football match.

But things took a melancholic turn when Ferdinand admitted to have fallen in love with Sush's mother at a point in time. They met at a bus stop, catching the same bus daily that they eventually struck up a conversation. She was nineteen and didn't know who he was, not being one who was interested in politics. He only told her that he "worked for the government". Even so, the truth eventually came out when a fellow classmate who saw them together pointed out the resemblance he had to their defense minister, who was married. When she confronted Ferdinand about it, he panicked.

He apologized for lying to her and expressed his love for her, promising her that he was already "thinking" about leaving his wife. Thinking about it wasn't enough, it seemed, and she made him choose there and then. He couldn't. He begged for more time. She gave him a week, and a week later, they met with him proposing that they still see each other in private so that he could keep his position in office, "to be able to provide for her with what I do best". Sush's mother called it off, and they didn't see each other until years later, when she turned up on his doorstep asking for child support for an infant he wasn't even aware of. He didn't know Larissa had contacted Valor about the bombing until it was too

late, and admitted to have never made an effort to look for Sush, knowing the risks involved that may well lead to career suicide.

Upon the close of arguments and testimonies, no one had their charges dropped.

The Robinson couple were sentenced to death for executing the long list of murders.

Larissa Ferdinand received the same sentencing with the judges concluding that her act was strongly motivated by jealousy and anger, a fact that was cemented by the phone recording Patterson made of her confession the other day before they fucked, after which he testified against her on the stand, indifferent to her tears and scowl of betrayal she was throwing his way.

Hazel's lawyers somehow managed to successfully plead the presence of mental insanity on her behalf, thus bringing the charge of murder to the less serious one of voluntary manslaughter when the defense of diminished responsibility was accepted by the court. Her lawyers argued that - being brought up by two parents who weren't in the right frame of mind - Hazel had developed certain levels of mental impairment - an assertion that was supported by clinical tests. They argued that - contrary to her parents who experienced a modicum of guilt in their first two murders - Hazel felt nothing after her first killings. Her parents were not insane when they committed the first murders, so the defense was not available to them, but their daughter had committed her killings with the mental impairment, so she qualifies to have the defense applied to her. Nonunanimously persuaded, the court spared Hazel from the death sentence, but she would be kept behind bars for as long as it took for her to "recover".

Upon this pronouncement, hunters in the courtroom and beyond booed while wolves, lycans and vampires growled in protest. Sush, despite sliding her hand into Greg's, found it difficult to calm him when she too

was enraged by the sentence. At the other end of the same bench, everyone heard something wooden being broken as one of the three judges in front utilized the gavel to call for order and court decorum to be observed.

Lucy, while trying to calm her husband with one hand on his lap when his grip on her shoulder tightened, had her free hand holding onto the piece of wood she unintentionally broke off the bench when she was gripping it to cope with the anxiety. When Hazel's sentence was passed, Lucy closed her eyes and took a deep breath before releasing a drawn out, frustrated exhale while amplifying a sense of control through the mate bond.

As the judge continued banging on the gavel and shouting for silence with less courage than the first time, Lucy shot her people around the courtroom a brief gaze - a silent command to rein in their emotions and beasts. This wasn't their territory. They had an image to uphold.

At their queen's command, they complied. Seeing the kingdom's forces calming down, the vampires did the same.

Sush shot the hunters a similar look - one that reminded everyone they weren't in the headquarters cafeteria and conveyed a warning that they could be kicked out if they didn't pipe down. Although reluctant, the hunters silenced themselves as well - some with a groan.

Fortunately for everyone, the worst pronouncement had come to pass.

Hazel's conspirators within hunters' headquarters, comprising two chameleons, two archers and six octopuses, were sentenced to a thirty-five-year jail term.

Minister Ferdinand was sentenced to a lifetime behind bars for his involvement in the black market along with the fraudulent act of using a bank officer as a puppet to receive the tainted proceeds. This bank officer and another nine of his colleagues who made the transactions

possible were bribed with ten percent of the proceeds to facilitate the minister's venture, thus they were subsequently convicted in separate trials. The needle that broke society's back was Ferdinand's long line of affairs, plummeting his popularity overnight as his entire political party bore the brunt of the scandal. His former mistresses who hadn't been hunted down and slaughtered by the Robinsons yet either confirmed their involvement with the minister with pride like it was an accomplishment from their younger days, or refused to speak to anyone about the past and went into hiding.

Needless to say, it wasn't long before an election was held and Agu was sworn in as the new defense minister whose first accomplished task was to grant the hunters their independence, a motion that easily received majority support now that Ferdinand had been convicted.

Valor was sentenced to imprisonment for aiding and abetting the first of the Robinsons' murders and for omitting to report the crime as an office holder. His sentencing got heavier when it was revealed that he was aware of the coded messages sent by Hazel through the encrypted phone to Ferdinand and himself but the former commander chose to do nothing. When the judge delivered the verdict, every hunter - even those who were supposed to be paying attention to their surroundings at the borders - leapt and cheered in undeterred jubilation.

By far, the lightest sentence went to Ferdinand's political rival - Joyce Clearwater, which was essentially a hefty fine and seven years behind bars for agreeing to be the puppet for the Robinsons in exchange for a generous profit share from the black market, as long as the Robinsons could remove Ferdinand from office and rig the election to get her to take his place.