

## Chapter 116 EPILOGUE

Xandar's jet landed next to the Forest of Oderem and everyone trailed out to meet Pelly, Octavia, Rafael and Amber.

The forest greeted them with the waft of freshly baked goods and a gentle breeze, growing pink and amber-colored flowers around Enora and bringing the butterflies that she always loved seeing. One landed on her nose and Enora's hands were about to catch it when it flew away.

The breeze brought along dried leaves of different shape, color and texture, raining them on Reida and Ianne who collected them. The girls even brought a small sack to gather them after their first visit, always patting the branch that would magically extend toward them as a way of conveying their thanks.

Sush lay her eyes on the forest for the first time, feeling an undeniable closeness, an unexplained warmth, but she also felt a strong pull that did not just come from the forest. When the leaves had been properly sacked up, the vampires led the way. Every step they took was pulling Sush closer to the source of the magnetic haul, relaxing the tension of a rope she couldn't see being bound between her and wherever they were headed to.

The moment a large castle came into view, her eyes bulged and her head cocked, brows furrowing deep, veins in her head almost popping from thinking hard.

A hand, callous and warm, left her hand and grazed across her lower back, hooking at her waist, pulling her close. 'Everything alright?' Greg linked.

'Have I... no, I'm sure I haven't. I've never been here.'

'You find it familiar, too?'

Her head spun to him. 'You felt the same way on your first visit?'

'No,' he admitted. 'But the queen did. As did the empress.' After a moment of stunned silence, he added, 'After that day at the forest, when you turned pieces of nothing into weapons, I had a feeling you're one of them - one of the five.'

"Five?" she asked aloud.

They entered the castle that was now used as a fortress for security - the one Greg spent two weeks setting up with the empire's forces. Trailing up the stairs had Sush's heart beating faster, and it wasn't because of the exercise.

Once the door opened, she let her instincts guide her around the empty room with a circular engraving on the floor, gravitating toward the sector with a carving of a bow. Kneeling at the edge, her hand reached to trace the shape and she felt something - part filled and part empty. It took her a moment to realize the fullness was from Lucy's and Pelly's presence, and the emptiness was from the unoccupied parts of the circle.

Her fingertips traced the length and shape of the depression that made up the bow, which befuddled her at how perfectly it matched the one given to her by her uncle - one of the few things she held onto for as long as she could remember.

There was a familiarity of this place, this room, this creepy circle that knew what her uncle's bow was like, and as her eyes turned gold, so did the carving. ◻


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Dear readers,

We've come to the end of The Indomitable Huntress & the Hardened

Duke, and I want to thank everyone who has stuck around. Please leave this book a review to share your thoughts! And share it with everyone you know because it needs more exposure!

Thank you for the gems, comments, reviews, follows, and - most of all - patience throughout this journey. When I started Book One, I would have never thought this would be the direction I'd take in Book Three, especially not when I was writing the first few chapters of my debut, but here we are.

I named the female lead Sushmita after my closest friend in the sixth form (she doesn't know yet), coupled with Alagumalai which means "beautiful mountain" and is part of the name of my favorite English teacher (she doesn't know either). I almost chickened out and was going to use something generic, but the tale didn't carry the spark I wanted as I began writing, so I swapped it back. If either of them ever read this, I hope... hm, what do I hope for? I hope they won't mind and see it as me projecting them as a heroine in a fantasy world I created? Yes, let's go with that. (I just wanted to use their names, guys. There, I said it. Their names - in my view - are as unique as the people who carry them in real life.) 

As for the male lead - I hope he's up to most of your standards. I understand many of us have had very high hopes for him since Book One. Not sure if the hunger for him is satiated to a certain extent, but hopefully it's suppressed a lot more now that you know he's taken XD 

With the closing of this book comes a temporary closing of the adults' story. In Book Four, the princess would come of age, and we'll meet someone new who'll be moving the series forward with her.

We will be seeing the adults again in the final book, but for now, the limelight would fall on the pups. I don't have a tentative publication date for Book Four yet, but I'll post an update on socials once I do (follow me!).


Per the usual way we part, I'll leave you with the thought I kept in the back of my mind for this tale: it's not always easy to let go, but until we've unshackled ourselves from the chains of the past, we won't possess the eyes to see the wonders we desire or the heart to welcome a future we're craving for.

Have a great rest of the day, and I hope to see all of you in Book Four!

Chapter Comments

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