

The Indomitable Huntress And The Hardened Duke

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Chapter 16

“He’s hot, isn’t he?” The orange-hair huntress, Hazel Robinson, whispered to Sushmita.

Hazel was deputy chief with a personality that was in direct contrast from her superior. She was the approachable one, the friendly one, the one you’d want at a party because she’d light up the room.

Sushmita, on the other hand, would just dim everything down - at least, that was how she felt.

It was surprising to them both that Sushmita was appointed chief when Hazel was already deputy under their former chief, Zasper Zavier. Sushmita tried to change the defense ministry’s minds but they saw no merit in “she’d already been deputy for years”, so the position went to Sushmita, who the ministry knew would handle the publicity and mediation with the kingdom well enough that they themselves would remain alive at the end of things.

Hazel and Abbott had been under close scrutiny when their respective chief and deputy had been found to be involved in the conspiracy. It took several weeks before they were cleared.

Abbott immediately screened his archers, and even

offered his superiors every form of cooperation needed to ensure they got to the bottom of things so that no other hunter was wrongfully blamed.

Hazel went into shock at the magnitude of crime, finding it hard to believe that a person she'd been shadowing for so long had been keeping something that even she - as deputy - didn't know, using the duration of time of her suspension pending full investigation to seek therapy. She came back only to find out Sushmita had taken over as chief, and she'd be reporting to her.

Thankfully, Hazel bore no grudge and had no hard feelings, having befriended her long before Sushmita had been nominated and appointed, even admitting that Sushmita had been spoon-feeding their predecessors anyway.

"Huh?" Sushmita now questioned flatly and mindlessly, ninety-nine percent of her attention was given to the list of weapon inventory while generously offering Hazel her final one percent.

"The duke," Hazel whispered. "He's hot."

Taking a pencil to tick through the numbers, Sushmita uttered monotonously, "You could always get him one of your ice lattes to cool him down."

Ignoring the disinterest in her voice, Hazel asked,

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“You think I could?” She actually sounded excited. “I mean, I’m not as catchy as Izabella, but he’d go for me regardless, right? I’ve got a brain and we both know she didn’t have much of it, unless his type is one without much gray matter... which can’t be true. They did say he fell for their queen once. She’s not exactly brainless.”

“That fox is definitely not brainless,” Sushmita mumbled, already feeling a throb in her head from thinking of having to deal with Lucy.

“I know! I’m not brainless either! I have a shot, right?”

“Hazel, you’re given a head to use, not to fish. It’s working hours. How are the lists in your hand coming along?”

“How can you concentrate with him in the room? Look at him.”

Sushmita didn’t. The next list took precedence. Why was Monica Upshaw pulled out of the agreed station to stand guard - again? This is beginning to reek of the Catrine Carter pattern.

“Yo, Sush. You listening?” Hazel snapped her fingers by Sush’s two o’clock, waving in her face for better measure. She was rambling about how brooding Greg was when she noticed Sush had zoned out, probably when she was talking about the bulges of his biceps.

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Blinking, Sush asked, "Did Valor sneak in any last minute notice about any archers being reassigned for something that I don't know about?" She hoped there was something on paper. She'd love to skip meeting her boss.

Hazel's brows raised, seriousness taken over. "Not that I know of. Let me go check with correspondence."

"That'd be great. Thank you."

Lingering for another brief moment, Hazel confessed in a whisper, "I'll pass Human Resources on the way. Might flash him a smile. Wish me luck."

Setting the lists aside and drawing up the field plans on the hologram, she spoke indifferently, "Good luck on not getting on his nerves."

"Thanks!"

Hazel skipped away as Sushmita perched into her chair, double-checking whether any other archers' names suddenly went missing. There weren't. It was only Monica Upshaw.

Sushmita then checked the chameleons. None were missing either. Even Catrine Carter was placed back on duty, though her post was a little remote if Sushmita were being honest - a small town with terrible internet access and a civilization that seemed to be decades behind theirs. Valor and Patterson

insisted it was fine and - as a non-chameleon - Sushmita yielded. One thing she'd learned was to pick her battles. But a thought lingered at the back of her mind: was this a battle she should take up or pass up?

Catrine was excused from many chameleon duties for months before things went back to normal. Sushmita and several others had asked her about needing to skip duties so often. Catrine Carter would've had everyone's sympathy had she not simpered and spat "personal reasons" in their faces like she had a weapon under her sleeve and would use it before even considering telling the truth. The pattern lasted eight months, ending just two months back.

Sushmita thought the shady matter was over. Now, Monica Upshaw, an archer, seemed to be following in Catrine Carter's footsteps. So where was Monica supposed to guard now? Her name was nowhere on the map.

Sushmita fired a text to Abbott and the Chief Archer's reply was that Valor cleared it. He wasn't given a reason.

Sigh. Sushmita would have to ask Valor about it later. For once, could she just go one day without having to see her boss? She'd already seen enough of him in the four months of trying to clean up Delilah's manure. The stench of fatigue probably still lingered on her.

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And the job was clearly far from done seeing that the duke and his forces had just begun their infiltration today.



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