

## Chapter 52

'Boss!' Ella linked in panic.

Greg heaved a frustrated sigh, pulled away from Sush, who was about to protest before noticing his glazed-over eyes, so she fell silent and waited patiently as he replied, 'You'd better make sure someone is dying or you're going to lose an organ, Tristan. I don't care if your husband would eventually get the queen to extract one of my own later.'

Ella's panic hit the next notch. 'SomeONE dying? Boss! The archers ARE DYING! IT'S MORE THAN ONE! THEY'RE TRAPPED! WHATEVER IS IN THERE IS MAKING OUR PEOPLE DIZZY AND SOME ARE CLOSE TO PASSING OUT! THE HUNTERS ARE ALREADY DROPPING LIKE FLIES! JADE STILL CAN'T HACK HIMSELF IN. WHERE THE HELL IS SUSH? HAVE YOU SEEN HER?'

Shit.

'How did it happen?' he asked, trying to remain calm, though Ella might be extracting his organs herself soon.

'Boss, with much respect, how about we save the autopsy for later and FIND THE FREAKING CHIEF!' Exactly why he asked how it happened - to get to the root of the problem before finding a viable solution. There clearly wasn't time to reason with Ella, especially when she continued speaking in a hurry, 'The octopuses say only Valor, Sush, and Abbott have the codes to the archers' floors that have magically locked themselves. Abbott is unconscious. Valor is unreachable. Sush can't be found! Those with the archers said even Hazel and a few octopuses have dropped unconscious from shock. We need to find Sush!'

'Sush is with me. Give me a moment, Tristan.' One eye cleared and locked with Sush, his grip on her arms tightened when he said, 'Codes for the archers' floors. Now.'

Sush blinked, perplexed. 'What? Why?'

"Something's happened. They can't get out. My people are there but it's not looking good for both sides, much less the hunters. Codes, Sush."

He was worried she'd panic or pass out like Hazel, but Sush's perplexity morphed into worry and eventually something in her took charge, her face coming back to the way it was whenever she was in the trenches, fierce but controlled when she calmly said, "200223."

Greg linked Ella the digits and within the next three seconds, she reported - with more relief - that it worked. The mavericks were getting the hunters out and the ambulances and paramedics had already been alerted and were on their way.

Ending the link, Greg recalled the way Sush's face and composure shifted within seconds, how she didn't even crack under the pressure like Ella or - worse still - surrender consciousness like the useless Traffic Cone. He shouldn't be surprised, given that she was the one who led negotiations years before she was appointed chief, but he was still astounded. Her control was impeccable.

Before his thoughts came to an end, she barged toward the stopper, extracted it and waited for the elevator to take her to the archers' floor. Greg came between her and the panel, double tapping the number to undo her attempt and tapped G instead, turning to her and sternly saying, "You are not going anywhere near there. We'll assess the damage outside."

Right before Sush could argue, they heard a sound and the elevator went into free fall, bringing them both to their knees as Greg growled and glued the stopper back onto the door. The deafening shriek on the external cables permeated their senses as his arm wrapped around Sush and pulled her in, locking her in his embrace to shield her from any possible impact while his free hand reached to swiped across all the lower floor buttons, hoping the system would make the elevator stop on the way down.

Within seconds that felt like forever, the metal cube they were in came to a halt. Greg wasn't sure whether it was tapping the lower floor buttons

or the stopper, or both, that managed it.

Helping Sush onto her feet, he had her wait at the inner corner when his claws dug through the metal door, then digging his fingers through, folded the metal in and he kicked it open.

Retracting the sharp structures, he offered Sush his hand. "Time to go."

The elevator stopped between the lobby and the upper floor of the trenches, so Greg lifted her to the upper opening before she crawled her way out, after which she offered him her arm as he climbed out behind her.

"You alright?" he asked, hand reaching for her face, thumb tracing her skin, searching for scratches and injuries.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Are y— On second thought, I'm not going to ask. You've already shown off your healing abilities today."

They headed for the line of mavericks carrying two hunters at a time over their shoulders, trailing down the emergency stairs and out of the building where the ambulances were. Flashing red lights, loud orders and stretchers filled the usually deserted space outside the headquarters.

After Baxter set down two of the ones he carried, he dashed to Greg, picking a small, empty jar out of his pocket and placed it in his boss's ready hand, saying, "Air sample." The maverick then disappeared back into the building along with many others. The lycans had pretty much recovered but were cursing under their breaths, not knowing about the metal walls that would descend and trap them in.

Sush's eyes scanned the fallen archers. Some were being given time-of-death declarations, others were being resuscitated. Hazel was nowhere in sight. Several ambulances had left and more were leaving as the doctors on site called for back-up. Sush wondered if Hazel was already being sent to the hospital.

Patterson arrived - hair disheveled, tie loose as dismay coated his features. He came over, looked Sush dead in the eye and hissed, "Where

the hell were you?"

Greg came to her side and Chief Chameleon took a step back by instinct when the duke explained, "The Chief Octopus was trapped in the elevator that went into free fall. We're lucky to have gotten out in one piece. Any more questions?"

Patterson's urge to blame vaporized, his features changed into one of shame and shock. "Wha— How?" Facing Sush, he said, "Maintenance has never been skipped even before we took charge of the divisions."

"I don't know how," Sush admitted, equally appalled. "For now, we can only hope the deaths and damage are kept to the minimum. I'll get the octopuses to run full checks on the archers' floors to figure out why the attack was launched in the first place. Have you seen Hazel?"

Trying to maintain his composure, Patterson uttered, "No, but the ones who did said she was one of the first to leave in an ambulance."

"Any chameleons involved?"

"Six," he said grimly. "They were there for the weekly combat training. One has just been pronounced dead."

They shared a melancholic moment of silence as their eyes roamed the space. Every archer was still unconscious.

As Sush's hawk eyes scanned the field, her rage escalated with each second when she noticed there was one person that was glaringly absent.


Where. Was. Valor?



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