

## Chapter 54

That was definitely a surprise for the Chief Octopus. Valor never saved anyone's ass but his own. He didn't even try very hard to save the asses of those involved in the Delilah conspiracy. He'd ask the lycans for better terms, better understanding - all of which were worded by Sush, of course - but he'd never asked for them to be spared. It was as if the commander simply accepted that was their fate. Sush was never one to believe a person could change overnight, which only meant Valor needed her alive and within the headquarters. If he needed her alive, he couldn't be the one behind it. If he wasn't the one behind it, he and Hazel were probably not exchanging any encrypted messages. Which meant Hazel was communicating with someone else.

Sush tone mellowed out when said, "So you clearly still need me. I'm now telling you that I can't create waterproof robots to take the archers' places overnight."

Valor waved a hand and stated matter-of-factly, "We're all trained in fields that are not our own. The extra octopuses and chameleons can ta —"

Patterson interjected, growing fearful for his own division. "Commander, I have to disagree."

"They're not trained enough!" Sush exclaimed, getting straight to the point that Patterson had planned to gradually transition to. She didn't have time for a gradual transition when she went on, "Yes, they can defend themselves but we're talking about defending a whole territory. We can get everyone to pick up practice sessions but it'd take at least a month before they're as field-ready as an archer."

"Maybe not even then," Patterson murmured, sighing and glancing at the ceiling.

Valor spat, "So what do you two suggest we do? Leave the

headquarters archer-free? Compromise defenses at the borders? God forbid you're thinking of asking the ministry to assign soldiers who are already spread thin."

"Ask for help, Valor," Sush insisted. "Ask from those who already have the skill. We'll get our people to train with the archers we'll be bringing back. In the meantime, we get someone else to protect us."

Valor looked at her like she'd grown a second head. "And who is this someone else you're referring to?"

"The lycans and werewolves," Sush said with utmost certainty.

Kenji choked on air from pure shock, his profuse coughing bounced off the walls of Valor's office and no one judged him. It was a justified response.

Patterson's eyes bulged from their sockets as he turned to Sush at what he saw as an absurd suggestion.

Valor was utterly lost for words, standing so still that he could pass off as a statue.

Taking advantage of the silence, Sush continued making her case, "They're trained. Properly trained. Many amongst them are seasoned fighters. They can do it, Valor. Ask them for help."

When Valor finally snapped out of his daze, he harrumphed and came up with the best excuse he could think of. "Just because they can, it doesn't mean they will, Alagumalai. Our species hadn't seen eye to eye for generations, and you're the last person who needs reminding that the tension had only worsened recently."

Not backing down, Sush argued, "We've been giving them everything they want. We've been cooperating and the execution of the terms in the treaty is smoother than any one of us can expect. We may not be in the kingdom's best books, but our present cooperation offers us a good enough standing to ask for their assistance."

Valor took a wary sideways glance at the duke, who was looking through his cluttered cabinets, when the commander questioned, "And you're

saying all of this while he is here?"

Greg scoffed. As if he weren't listening. "Obviously." He reached to a random folder - the thickest one and pulled it out, eyes going down the contents page. When he urged Sush to let him dig through the physical archives, he'd never imagined being able to do it in front of Valor, which only meant one thing - there was nothing valuable here.

Patterson looked between Greg and Sush before offering his opinion, "Commander, perhaps... circumstances have changed enough for the kingdom to take a request like that seriously."

Valor caught the Chief Chameleon's sights. He was not deaf to the rumors circulating about the duke fancying the most difficult and terrifying person in the headquarters. If Valor were being honest, it was the second reason he defended her from Ferdinand. The last thing he needed was for the duke to fly off the handle about her dismissal and create another mess that would take another four months to clean up. The first reason for defending Alagumalai was - as much as he hated to admit - she was, at present, irreplaceable.

As Greg placed the folder back in its place, he turned and stole a quick glance of a still-serious Sush and a reluctant Valor as the commander heaved a defeated sigh. "I'll have to run it through Ferdinand," the old man murmured.

Sush said, "Tell him it's either taking a chance on the kingdom's forces or his own soldiers. Remind him what happened in the east and our recent disaster in the west. See if the soldiers are up for something like this."

Valor's head gave a slow shake like it was a plan that was never going to be approved by a minister who wasn't the strongest advocate for humanizing creatures he saw as animals.

So Valor wasn't surprised when Ferdinand gave a flat no through his secretary, but when Valor elaborated on the available options and their situation, there was a pause before the secretary said he'd call back. Within ten minutes, the call returned with a grudging okay.


The kingdom was contacted and warriors were promptly deployed to human territory as selected archers were called back to manage things at the headquarters. To Valor's and Ferdinand's dread, the kingdom's willingness to provide assistance on short notice only meant they had to extend a personal courtesy to convey the highest gratitude that neither of them were feeling.



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