

The Indomitable Huntress & the Hardened Duke - by Stina's Pen

Chapter 6

Greg felt something when he looked at Sushmita: immense distrust - an involuntary response that oozed from Izabella's betrayal. Every huntress was an enemy, he was sure. This one was no exception. She may be an octopus but - for all anyone knew - she was probably also a part-time chameleon, given how attractive she was. And chameleons were the most ruthless of the bunch.

He knew she'd been the brains behind correspondences, the queen had told him so, but he imagined her to be more... defensive, like Patterson; or anxious, like Abbott.

If Greg's facial reading wasn't off, the huntress just looked tired. And enraged. Yes, definitely enraged. And she had no right to be! It was her fellow huntress who started this whole thing.

Sushmita exhaled as she scribbled one word on her notepad and pushed it to Valor, who took one look and his eyebrows shot to his hair before he pushed back the notepad. Facing the royals, he began, "Like we said before, Izabella Delilah's crime..."

Lucy interrupted. "I think the Chief Octopus's recommendation on how you should start this meeting would make us want to kill you less, Valor." She'd seen the scribble - apologize, and could feel the huntress's frustration from across the table when the commander discarded her advice like trash instead treating it as gold.

Valor checked his cards. The odds were definitely stacked against him, against all of them - as Sushmita had been drilling into his head for months on end that he'd begun having nightmares about the way her nostrils flared when she said it.

The leader swallowed the lump of ego in his throat, clenched his teeth, and tried again, "I apologize for attempting to postpone our meeting."

"For lying," Lucy pressed mercilessly.

"The matter was urgent, Your Majesty." He tried not to spit at her title, as much as he wanted to, but the way he despised being spoken to by someone decades younger than him AND who was a woman slipped off in a subtle way.

Lucy's brows raised. She'd seen the projection on the white screen earlier. "A discussion of your people's ranking and stations for next term is NOT more important than the threat several of yours posed to our people, my family. Wouldn't you agree?"

It was a dare. It'd take a fool not to see it. Valor didn't have to look to Sushmita to know the right move was to concede. "Yes, Your Majesty," he uttered grudgingly, fingers digging into the flesh on his lap to cope with the bruised ego. Fucking lycans. Fucking wolves. Fuck them all! This one, though small, caused the biggest problems! If times were different, he'd shove a dagger down her throat or put a clean bullet through her skull.

One of Lucy's hands was on Xandar's lap since they sat, his hand over hers, more to keep himself from exploding than to keep her calm. He began, "Now that we've laid your lies on the table and got that out of the way," Xandar accepted the document Lucy handed to him and placed it in front of Valor. "Let's go through this one more time then sign it off and you can get back to that very urgent matter of yours."

"With much respect, Your Majesty," Valor began, putting Sushmita on higher alert. *What was he doing*, she thought. "We need more time to assess the feasibility of your demands."

Toby noted pointedly, "You had four months."

"Minister, the treaty - which practically demands we give your species physical access to our operations and security systems for the next three months and virtual access for the next decade - is, I'm not sorry to say, too steep a price for the... incident that the duke had the misfortune of suffering."

Sushmita's head tilted back, closing her eyes so no one would see what she was thinking, which was her boss being yet another fucking idiot. God help her.

Greg would admit that when he put that item in the list of demands, he'd expected a firm and flat no from his cousin if not from the queen first. He was surprised when they fully supported it.

"Misfortune..." Lucy began, with the voice of frost. "...is a condition brought about by nature, something none of us can control. What happened to the duke was *not* a misfortune. It was a conspiracy designed to compromise our species. A scheme to get close to the duke to take my daughter's blood and you call that an 'incident'? Which the duke had the 'misfortune of suffering'?"

She scoffed, an upward tug at the right corner of her lips did nothing to take away the deathiness on her face when she added with feigned understanding, "Well, I suppose everyone has a different way of assessing the gravity of a situation. I would say more, always being big on words, but my New Year's resolution is to speak less. So let's try something new."

Turning to Greg as he extracted a black velvet box from his inner coat and opening the lid as if he was offering the queen jewelry when it was to reveal a multi-needle syringe disguised as a hairbrush, Lucy's eyes darkened in deep onyx as she took it from the

extravagant casing. “Fortunately, the substance inside remains functional. Tested on several rats, all of which died within weeks, as you well know since you’ve been given the report and a sample of the substance, which your own people have returned with similar reports. It’s very creative, using malleable needles for it to pass off as a common brush, only this brush is able to subtly extract the victim’s blood while injecting the suppressants inside to numb the victim’s receptors so that she would be none the wiser. It’s extremely clever, using needles that hold the substance in so its scent and danger remains undetectable.”

Her chair scraped against the floor as she stood. “Now, Valor, to help you better understand the gravity of the situation, I’m going to use this brush on you. We’ll see if anything happens. If it does, if you drop dead, it’ll simply be an incident that you’d have the misfortune of suffering. Let’s start, shall we?”

Valor was about to shoot up but the lycan warriors stepped forward and held him down. Face turning white as Lucy’s heels clicked toward him, his paling lips quivered as Abbott attempted to get off his seat only to be stopped by another lycan warrior.

When the tips of the brush touched the first strands of hair, Valor leaned away and yelled, “Alright! Alright! Just... remove that thing!”

Holding it in place, Lucy prompted, “Was it just an incident?”

“N-No,” Valor muttered.

“That the duke had the misfortune of suffering?” she pressed.

Valor’s eyes inadvertently met Greg’s cold ones before the commander looked away, muttering, “No.”

“Glad to know we’re finally on the same page,” Lucy replied with a cocky smile, freeing him from the brush and hearing him release a relieved sigh as she turned to her warriors. “That’ll do, Fiona, Simon. Thank you.” The warriors bowed and released their hold of Valor, stepping back into their positions.

Patterson’s dick twitched at Lucy’s speech and the show that followed. Something about her made everything that just happened hot as fuck. He had to cross his legs to hide the erection as one hand went over his mouth to hide the smile underneath.

His arousal hit the noses of many and all raging eyes turned to him when Lucy threatened with a growl, “Turn off the damn thing or I will tear off the structure myself and feed it to Valor’s dog.”

“It’s harder than it seems,” he muttered to himself, only realizing his poor choice of words after they left his lips and the pun that was clearly not intended made Xandar

shoot up from his chair, pulling Patterson from across the table, earning a groan from the hunter when his knees hit the edge.

Greg turned to Lucy while watching the show. "Should I help tear off the structure, my queen?"

"No, Greg. Not today."

"Another day, then," Greg muttered.

Xandar's claws from his thumb and index finger at Patterson's jawline sunk into his skin. Patterson grunted, desperate to refrain from screaming and cursing at his own body's response to the brute's mate. Red fluid trickled from the wounds and everyone smelled Patterson's blood.

Although most had their eyes either on Xandar or the struggling Patterson, Sushmita's eyes stuck to her notepad, her hand holding her head like it was too heavy. I'm surrounded by idiots, she thought for probably the hundredth time.

A loud crash followed when Xandar threw Patterson's body back into his chair and the hunter fell with the chair upon the impact, groaning again as his hand rushed to feel his wounds.

With a hand on Lucy's back, Xandar delivered a warning, "That should remind you about control. And if they don't, I'm more than happy to make adjustments to help you remember. But those would involve the permanent removal my wife suggested and it would not be fed to a dog. It would be shoved down your throat."

That made Patterson's structure shrivel as his chest rose and fell in exhausted breaths. He refused Abbott's outstretched hand and pushed himself up, setting the chair back in place, avoiding looking at Lucy in case he lost it again.

Sushmita scribbled something and pushed the notepad to Valor, who - this time - covered it with his palm and leaned back before reading it from his hand. "If you don't sign the damn thing now, the list would only get longer. You and Patterson just made it longer."

Putting the notepad facedown, Valor exhaled sharply before murmuring, "Let's get this over with."