

Chapter 63

Drawing a breath into her lungs, more for courage than for air, her fingers fiddled with the locket before gripping it tight, clutching onto it like she wouldn't survive the next minute without doing so. Taking a shaky breath, she undid her necklace and unclasped the locket, holding it in one hand as she murmured, "This is her." As Greg came closer to take a look, she continued in a whisper, "That old headband I wear everyday? It was the last thing she bought for me. It was too big for me at that age, but I loved it so much that Mom said I could always wait till I'm older to wear it. I've worn it everyday since I got it and even wore it to bed in the months after she disappeared."

Greg's sights conveyed the woman in the black and white photo to memory, which wasn't an arduous task to begin with. Holding Sush closer, he uttered, "You look just like her."

Sush managed a small smile. "My aunt used to say that." Holding it for a moment longer, she then gently brought both sides of the locket to a shut, clenching it in her palm as she continued, "When Mom didn't come back, my uncle and aunt contacted the police, and after three weeks of investigation, they found her... remains... in a jungle..." Her nose siphoned a sharp inhale as her eyes closed again, letting the tears burn behind the close lids when she muttered, "Remains from an explosion."

Greg's thumb had stopped stroking her. He'd seen and done a lot of ugly things in his life but even this shook him. His eyes darkened into a furious shade of onyx. His shoulders stiffened. He was going to kill someone, and it was going to be his best work yet. It was going to be slow, painful, and end with a finale as grand as that explosion.

"But then... something weird happened," Sush proceeded, putting his murder plan to a pause to fully focus on her. "The investigations for the ones behind the explosion just... stopped."

Greg's brows furrowed. Deep. Fuck killing someone. He was going to kill more than one. He was going to kill them all.

"The reason?" Sush scoffed. "They couldn't find anything leading them to any perpetrator. You know, it would've been believable if the police didn't suddenly get swapped with hunters. The policemen leading the first team were dismissed from the force and - two months later - were deported. I tried looking them up, thinking they may have answers, or clues at the very least, but I never found them. To the government and the police, it was a closed case within a year. To my relatives, it was an enigma that they hoped would be resolved but it never was in their lifetime. And to me," her free hand wrapped around the cold metal railing, heating it up by sheer aggravation of the injustice that tainted her memory and dictated the course of her life. "To me, I know that, if I want to find the truth, to excavate it from however deep it's been buried, I have to do it myself."

Taking comfort in his touch that - in its own way - told her she wasn't alone before bringing her eyes up to his, she explained, "My mark appeared the moment I decided I didn't want to accept what was done to my mother, to me. I doubt she was perfect but detonating her took things too far. There are more civil ways to handle things. Also, this is probably a good time to mention that my mark has an anomaly."

She turned, her back faced Greg as she held her hair to one side.

Greg came closer, peering at the gray mark of an octopus with... five limbs.

"No other octopus, past and present, had less or more than eight limbs. Believe it or not, this was the anomaly that held me back in terms of rank all those years." She let a moment of silence pass, giving Greg time to study the mark before she said, "The original plan was to hone my hacking skills enough to get into the archives of hunters headquarters. But when I met Kenji as an engineer and we started dating, he eventually saw the mark two weeks later and found out what I was, basically like him, and he introduced me to the hunters' world. I saw a

better way to find the truth. I was assessed and the assessors figured I was defective in some way. Some still do. Others just say it's because I'm the product of Liabilities. By the way, the name of my mother on file? I changed her first name in every registration system connecting me to her, to keep suspicions at bay."

Staring at her mark and swallowing a lump in his throat, he asked, "May I?"

With a slight shrug, she muttered, "Of course."

His fingers gently traced the mark, conveying the shape to memory - the low voltage of electricity felt a little higher this time. Unbeknownst to him, Sush felt something, too - a spark, a charge, one she'd never felt with anyone else, one that traveled through her heart and set the butterflies in her stomach free.

Clearing her throat in a way that made his fingers pause, she uttered, "That's not all of it yet, Greg. There's still one more thing."


He turned her around gingerly, eyes stayed on hers. "I'm listening."



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He wasn't just listening. He was absorbing, taking in every word like she was preaching a sermon imparted by the Goddess. The intensity in his eyes radiated his need to know. The range of emotions - from anger to sorrow - marring his face show that he wasn't just listening, he was connecting with her, feeling these things with her, and it was that very action that drew her physically closer to him, because emotionally, she was already attached.

Her throat flexed a hard swallow, and she threw out the biggest confession of the night, "I'm not with the hunters because I want to be." Admitting it to herself, in her head, was one thing. Confessing to someone outloud, someone she hadn't known very long, was foreign and unnerving. "I'm here because I'm convinced there's something in their systems that'll lead me to the truth on the night my mother was murdered. I've been looking for years. I'm sure it won't be something obvious but I know there's something - a link, a clue that I'm not seeing yet. Remember the files from the east? The one on an explosion of a huntress?"

Greg's heart stopped beating, but Sush went on, "It wasn't a case on my mother but the modus operandi seemed eerily similar. I have a lead and I think I'm getting close." Eyes trailing to his throat, she said, "I'm not here to serve or to protect, Greg. I'm not here because I can or want to help. I'm here to draw blood, for revenge. After I've gotten what I want, I'm leaving, putting all that - the murder, the psychoticness of the plot, the hunters - I'm putting it all behind me and moving on."

Greg didn't look surprised, and she didn't know why she expected him to be. He was a firm believer in revenge as well, evident from the executions. Perhaps it took a bloodthirsty creature to appreciate another bloodthirsty creature.

His hand, rough and warm, reached to cup her cheek when he

questioned in a wary baritone, "Are you sure about that, Sush? Are you sure that's what you want?"

She knew this was coming. The doubts, the sheer lack of morality in the whole thing, the fact that she wouldn't be the better person if she trailed down this route.

The fact is: she didn't care about being the better person. If better people lost the ones they loved in the most horrible way imaginable, then she was more than fine with being the worst person. Besides, if one adopted a different perspective, they'd see she was technically ridding the world of dangerous people who'd continued harming others like her mother if Sush herself didn't follow through with her plan to end them. She didn't have to be the better person, she needed to be the person that ended those who took the lives of others.

Sush reluctantly removed his hand from her face, her eyes darted to his shoulder as her insides began twisting, mourning for having to lose him, too. In a weakened voice, she said, "I'm not changing my mind, Greg. I deserve to know the truth. And if there's a cover-up, those behind it sh—"

His grip tightened around her fingers when he interjected, "I don't disagree. In fact, I fully support it. And I'm certain I just fell even more in love with you because of it. What I meant was..." As Sush held her breath, he continued in a firm whisper of disbelief, "Are you sure you're not here because you want to serve and protect? Perhaps I read you wrong, but you seem to love it in the trenches. The way you get lost in your work is something many creatures fail to find or follow through in their lifetimes. You clearly don't like people like Valor, Patterson, and a few of those incompetent fools, but you seem to love what you do. You seem to always enter a different universe when you work. Did I read you wrong?"

She'd long known he was checking her out, feeling his eyes lingered on her and never seeing those lilac orbs travel to anyone else the same way. But the fact that he read her - and read her accurately - brought out

her vulnerable side that she'd never shown to anyone since her late family. It never felt safe to be vulnerable with anyone. Not until him. He may not know her as well as her family did yet, but it was clear he wanted to.

In a whisper, she admitted, "No, you didn't read me wrong. But..." she sighed. "I don't see how I can keep being there after I've drawn blood. If the murder has been buried this deep, someone powerful is involved, and to topple a person like that would trigger a lot of hunters if not the government itself. I already have people wanting me suspended - or worse, removed - for the executions I purportedly let happen. This plan to fulfill my own interest? It's going to be ten times worse."

Greg's teeth gritted at the suggestion that someone would want to hurt her, that someone dared think about doing such a thing. "There are ways to get around those things, Sush. There are methods to get what you want and get rid of the people against it. Murder itself is an option." In fact, he was already curating the steps for it.

Eyeing him a glare, she declared, "I don't want to draw any more blood than necessary. Murders aside, I wouldn't want to be working in a place that sees me as a traitor. Besides, I'm not out of options. You read my profile. I have a degree and a good enough track record in the non-hunter world to start again somewhere."

Greg sighed, knowing her well enough to know the look in her eye when she wasn't going to change her mind. Slowly, he lifted her hands, watching himself stroke her fingers, getting lost in the motion as frustration creased his forehead. Then, his voice came in a low murmur, "If that is what you choose, if that is what makes you happy, then I don't see why you shouldn't do it."

Happy? Hah. "Not all of us have the luxury to be happy, Greg," she remarked with a smirk that carried evident loss - an emotion that she hid well before tonight.

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His jaw clamped taut, heart ached at the thought that she wasn't fully happy. Someone like her deserved all the happiness the world could offer, maybe even more. Knowing better than to disagree, which would push someone of her character away, he decided to simply say, "Maybe, but all of us do have the power to sabotage whatever little we have of it."

There was a pause, a quietness between them, allowing Sush to ponder before he added, "I'm sure you've thought this through long before we met. I'm sure you know what you want. And you've clearly shown that you're more than capable of getting anything. At the end of your venture, all I want is for you to be somewhere without ever needing to leave, somewhere you're safe and happy, somewhere that allows you to escape into your universe when you work."

That made her think. Really think. She'd worked in a notable company in the non-hunter world, but she wouldn't say she was happy there. Everything was so rigid, so controlled, especially if one was new. Plans were handed out. Innovation was only welcomed if it coincided with the project and research at hand, and it was always about what the market wanted.

Sush didn't give a damn about the market. But she did give a damn about security and everything it took to perfect it, if not improve it. Admittedly, her mother's disappearance and the subsequent discovery of the murder had been a strong motivator behind the direction she'd wanted to take in her skills to, but the point remained: security, weapons, defenses - they fascinated her. These were the things that brought her soul to life, that launched her from reality and into the universe Greg had apparently caught her in.

He was right. She loved it in the trenches. And although she'd been mentally preparing herself to ultimately let go of it, a part of her was still holding on to the thread of hope that she wouldn't have to. On her best

days, she even wondered whether she should just stall the plan or give it up entirely to keep working there. But then she recalled where she was, who she was amongst - the people who had a hand in burying the truth, and she brought herself back on track.

"I won't change my mind," Sush said, firm and sure. "I won't stop until I know what happened, why it happened, and finish off those who made it happen."

A smile cracked on his lips as he brought her closer when he muttered, "I know... And I hope you know you're not doing this alone. We'll get to the bottom of things together."

It wasn't just gratitude that coursed through her veins, but happiness as well. His words, though delivered in a monotone, touched her heart in more ways than one. His eyes conveyed more emotion than any intonation ever could.

In the midst of her enjoying the silence between them, Greg's eyes went to the springs of her hair, the curls that captivated him every single day, that he only touched when they were close to kissing the other day. Without the pink headband to overshadow them, they look all the more whole and perfect, especially on her, especially with those eyes.

His fingers reached out, threading through her hair and he couldn't help but smirk when Sush released a sigh, leaning into his hand that ultimately found her cheek. His thumb traced her lower lip, the yearning from the elevator the other day and the dance floor just minutes ago rekindled, the urge coming back ravenous and ferocious - a hunger she matched judging by the way her pupils dilated and her breath shallowed even though they hadn't even done anything.

Her hand slid up his shoulder as her body glued to his, eliciting his growl as blood shot to his groin before he pressed her against the wall, hand behind her head to shield her skull - a move that sent her arousal spiraling free in the space between them, a move that made her want to submit, which she instinctively did when he captured her lips, melting into him as he pressed his mouth deep onto hers, the cocky

smirk lifting his lips when she moaned, creating the opening he was waiting for as his tongue plunged in without permission or hesitation and he explored, tasting her and stroking her tongue slowly, lovingly, drawing out her whimper, bringing another snarl out of him. She felt him pressed against her thigh - hardness to softness - as her fingers raked through his hair.

Rough hands glided up her arms before they pinned her wrists above her head. Leaving one hand there, Greg tongue went deeper into her mouth as his free hand trailed back down her bare arm, leaving little fires in its wake. He reached her waist before moving quickly to her butt, where he squeezed forcefully, famishedly.

Another gust of air left Sush. Her body arched toward him, relishing in the scorching trail of pleasure his palm left from her butt which moved up her back and finally to her breast. The strong, callous hand kneaded the softness and fingers and thumb fiddled with its peak, pinching it to bring her impossibly closer, intensifying his need for him, coaxing her to relinquishing control. He felt it was only fair, since his need for her had long been anything but controllable.

When her tongue retreated and she backed away, a fierce growl of protest left the depths of his lungs. He was far from done.


Instead of looking afraid, she looked softened, flushed as her chest rose and fell. Her heart beneath his palm cupping her breast pounded in trepidation with the quicken breaths. Her eyes drifted from his mouth to his nose, then to his eyes - which looked like he was ruminating on something that matched the very thing she had in mind, and with a conspiratorial smile, she whispered, "Want to get out of here?"



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In the bedroom of the diplomatic residence, Greg pushed her up against a wall, mouth sucking and teeth nibbling on her cheek, her jaw, her neck as his hands roamed her body, bolder than before. Her moans came out louder as he trailed down her cleavage, mouth snuck underneath the garment and the padding stitched to it before his tongue greeted her peak with a wet, seductive stroke.

She groaned, eyes rolling back and hands clinging onto his hair for support when her legs gave way. Her underwear was already drenched as heat radiated in waves from her body, need coursing through her veins and making her lower region throb.

"You should know," he began in a low rumble, kissed her breast, and continued, "I'm anything but gentle when it comes to this." With that, he took a nipple between his teeth and bit, letting a precious whimper escape her lips. "It won't be an amateur performance of sucking and kissing. And there won't be whispers of sweet nothings." He went to her other breast, making her back arch before he proceeded to utter, "You'll be bitten, slammed, spanked, and you will scream."

The visual sent Sush on an all-time high. Her arousal filling the room beseeched his animal to pounce, but his human preferred dragging this out, wanting her to hear her beg before giving himself to her.

Leaving a wet trail all the way up to her neck, he bit on her earlobe and said, "I won't go slow once we start. And you won't get the respect you got from me in the trenches. I may be at your mercy out there, but here - within these walls - " He scoffed, darkly and alluringly. "I will make you submit. I will make you bend. And I will make you beg."

Sush sighed, already surrendering. Submission had always seemed daunting. It meant giving in, relinquishing all control, trusting the one leading completely. Since Sush had never managed to trust anyone

fully, she'd never relinquished control, never given in. It never felt safe to submit.

With Greg, though. It was different. Especially after the way he shielded her in the elevator that almost crashed, especially after witnessing the lengths he'd go to protect his family, especially after their heated stares and conversations in recent weeks. Submitting to him didn't just feel right, it made her feel safe, and it made her feel free.

An arrogant smirk tipped the corners of Greg's lips when he peeled the thin straps off her arms, letting the dress pool around her legs before creating a small space between them, hands on both sides of her bare waist as he admired the feast before his darkening eyes. The delicious view got his animal even more impatient, wanting nothing more than to lunge, to bury deep inside her at that very second. But his human remained adamant about savoring every moment, his lustful eyes trailed to the set of breasts, the bare skin that made his chest rise and fall.

In the midst of his heaving, her hands trailed to her underwear, slowly tugging at the waistband. She enjoyed the way his eyes darkened further as she slid the last garment down inch by torturous inch. A growl left Greg's lips when the masterpiece of brown flesh was now bare and in all its glory before him once the last impediment was on the floor.

Peeling her off the wall, he took his time circling her like a predator would its prey, the features of her body imprinted in his mind. Her skin glowed beneath the dim lights. Her perky ass was a real tease, and those long legs...Goddess, he could picture himself licking the mile. And those rising and falling bosoms would fit perfectly into his mouth, hardened nipples that he was going to enjoy nibbling and pulling.

He paused behind Sush, one hand spread on her abdomen as the other reached for her hand, guiding the slender fingers to his zipper, making her breathing hitch. They pulled it down together and Greg unbuckled his belt before his pants joined her dress on the floor. She felt him through his underwear. Stiff. Hot. Large.

As his hand found her breast once more, he brought her face to the side and took her lips with his in a devouring kiss, tongue invading her mouth so fervently like he was determined to leave his mark in there. Her fingers sneakily trailed up his waistband, giving it a tug, trying to pull down the garment until she figured it was easier to pull him out.

The moment her hand snuck in, a low, alluring growl echoed from his mouth into hers as he gave her breast a merciless squeeze before pinching the nipple and hearing her moan. Her hand found what she was groping for and gently brought it out. But before she could go any further, he held her wrist, bringing her hand away, pressing his steel hard-on against the arc of her butt and hearing her sigh.

His lips came to her neck, relishing in the rapid flutter of her pulse beneath his mouth. His deep voice penetrated through the small space between them, "I don't know how you did this in the past, but here's how I'm going to do it." His fingertips trailed down her bare arm, leaving hundreds of goosebumps in their wake. "First, I'm going to choke you with my cock. Then, I'm going to eat out of you. After that, I'm going to pound into you so hard that you come out shattered and nothing less than a mess. And we're not leaving this room until you can't remember your name." He circled back around, coming back to face her. His hand ventured to her ass, cupping it and gripping it fiercely, bringing her close as she gasped when he asked, "Are you amenable to that, my octopus?"

The lust in his eyes, possessiveness in his words, and dominance of his aura sent her further to the edge. Another sigh left her when she leaned into him, pressing herself into his erection when she breathlessly replied, "Yes."

In a more serious tone by her ear, with his nose buried in her curls, he murmured, "At any time any of it gets too much, double tap me anywhere. Is that understood?"

She mm-ed, no longer able to speak.

Holding her by her abdomen and gluing her back to his front, he parted



her thighs, sliding his fingers through her slippery folds as he hummed in approval of her wetness. Her body quivered, and his fingers were drenched, her cunt clenched around them as his other hand held her up by her throat.

Slipping his fingers out of her folds, eventually getting her whimpers of protests that sent more blood to his groin, he brought the wetness to his mouth, licking the taste off his fingers and humming by her ear. "I hope you know what you've just agreed to, my huntress. You've awakened this beast before today and you've baited it tonight. Now, there's no turning back. Get on your knees."


She sank to the floor, so willingly that his chest constricted as his cock throbbed. Her hands worked fast in pulling his underwear all the way down. His hand fisted her hair and tugged it back. Her eyes bulged at his upright shaft, mesmerized by its length and girth. Before he could instruct her to open her mouth, she brought herself to the tip, her tongue toying with the fluid there, the sensation making him groan as a hot shudder rippled through him.



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