

Chapter 69

The next day did not start with good news, nor did it progress with any.

Abbott and his deputy were dead, as were many others who were exposed to the poison. Only three of the sixteen archers survived the coma, with the doctors reporting that the survivors' ability to make a full recovery remained uncertain, thus they were under strict monitoring. Hazel survived, but her condition remained under supervision as well. And she was awake for not more than four hours a day, as were the three archers. Even during their short hours awake, they weren't completely lucid enough to recall the events from the other day.

The next Chief Archer had to be appointed, but the discussion and vote wouldn't be for another week, so Valor was chief in name, Sush and Patterson were co-chiefs behind the scenes. Everyone, including the entire defense ministry, knew this.

"Fucking assholes," Greg cursed, not bothered to tone it down when she gave him the news after returning from the noble leader's office.

Flatly, she replied, "Yes, always have been and always will be. Now get off my chair, Greg. This is my desk."

Smirking at her feistiness, he leaned into her seat and swiveled for a bit, refusing to budge. "Having trouble standing already? It's barely noon."

A hand buckled at her hip, she retorted, "If anything, I'm having trouble with your self-inflation."

A slow smile spread across his lips before he stood and sauntered to her. Hand clutching her elbow, his mouth closed in on her ear, and he questioned in his deep voice, "Are you?"

His breath coasted across her ear and trickled down her neck, sending a rush of heat spiking through her core. It was insane how two words that were completely unrelated to anything sexual were able to set her ablaze and send her arousal spiraling free.

Not bothering to keep his knowledge to himself this time, especially not after their magical night, he took a deep, animalistic, audible inhale, the smile morphing into an arrogant smirk when he muttered, "If that's the case, I'd say you have an appetite for trouble."

With that, his hand left her elbow, fingers brushing across her skin as he left her station. Just like that. He turned her on, left her hot and bothered, and left, letting her deal with her flushed face on her own. The mavericks around her were already trying very hard not to look at her in case their taunting smiles revealed their ability to detect her arousal as well.

Sush sank into her chair as business-like as possible, trying to cool herself off before her prying colleagues tossed questions that she didn't know how to answer without smiling like a lunatic yet.

Her body was sore as hell, but they did get a little better after the warm bath Greg prepared and soaked her into that morning, then massaged her thighs with the little knowledge he absorbed from

the Internet while waiting for the tub to fill.

She could walk normally, for the most part. But she'd already been getting questions about her looks, about whether she changed anything. Sush didn't, but she hadn't yet realized the glow that she now carried, her scowl now either a flat line or a slight smile, even when she wasn't around Greg. The stern energy remained, but anyone could feel it was less malicious.

They witnessed her behavioral change at gradual paces, especially after interacting with the duke in the past weeks. When they saw her leave with the duke the previous night, as subtle as the two tried to be, many wondered if the duke would be so kind as to extend his stay to keep their chief - whom they feared but respected more than Valor himself - remained as she was now - less daunting.

When she sat long enough with the paperwork, her chair scraped and she made her way to the test lab, checking on the progress of the bulletproof bodysuits they were improving, along with laser blades, safety goggles and masks that every hunter would eventually be mandated to carry with them. The blades, goggles and masks were a new plan, implemented after the western massacre. The idea was for hunters to shield their senses with the goggles and masks in the presence of zahar while using the blade to cut their way out to safety.

Kenji joined her as they discussed probable complications and brainstormed improvements with the rest of the team.

Greg kept his eye on them, making sure Mr. Sophisticated was staying in his lane and wasn't

trying to take the one who was his to claim.

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In the lab, Kenji had been darting away from Greg's glare, yet their eyes still met. Three times. Carefully approaching Sush who had her back against the duke as she ran through the specifications, Kenji kept a safe distance from her and whispered, "Sush, I know we don't owe each other anything, but if you could get your boyfriend to ease on the scowling, I'd owe you."

Sush's brows knitted, head pivoted to him, eyes blinked in confusion, then turned just in time to see Greg's lips tilt into a seductive smirk directed at her. She quickly turned back to Kenji before being drowned by those lilac eyes. Right before she got any words out, Kenji said, "Don't believe that smile, Sush. He's been giving me the exact opposite the whole morning. I didn't even do anything."

She shrugged and directed her attention back to her tablet. "He knows we dated."

Whisper-yelling in panic, he hissed in betrayal, "Why would you tell him that?"

"I didn't. He figured it out himself. But I didn't deny it so... yeah, he knows."

"He knows something that happened eons ago! People move on. What is his problem?"

"Relax, Kenji. The jealousy trait is imprinted in that species's DNA. For all we know, he'd still be like this even if we hadn't dated. I mean, have you seen his cousin?"

"Don't remind me." Kenji shuddered. "I met the king once before the queen came into the picture. My voice cracked midway when I was greeting him and it came out sounding like a squeak. I've never greeted him after that. Stayed far away and avoided him at all costs. My brain may be at its best with systems, screens and in underground labs, but I'd take working overtime over meeting the king again."

Sush's tapping and scrolling halted, then turned to him and questioned with a smile that was paving the way to a laugh when she asked, "Squeaked?"

"Alright, now you're just being mean," Kenji noted with narrowed eyes, "The point is: as much as I enjoyed the king putting Patterson in his place when the jaw-incision tale spread to the east, I've done nothing to be at the receiving end of this... barbaric wrath." Casting a wary glance at Greg, Kenji murmured, "God, he looks like he's about to pounce." His head swung to Sush. "Has he pounced before? Are these walls thick enough to stop lycans? We should look into modifying the thickness of the glass, for our safety."

"You actually squeaked." Sush chuckled, still stuck on that topic when her sights returned to the device.

"Oh, fuck. Now you've done it," Kenji cursed when what seemed like a gust of wind whooshed from the other end of the trench.

"What?" Sush asked just as the monitor at the entrance beeped and the glass door opened.

In-walked the devil himself as Kenji muttered, "Of course. Who needs him to break the glass when he has been given civilized access. God, I can't wait to

head back to the east."

With those last words, he promptly excused himself as Greg took large strides toward Sush, eyeing her with partially onyx orbs when she noted pointedly, "You're scaring him."

Greg's scowl pulled into an arrogant smirk. "Good. That's the idea."

His hand slid across the small of her back and landed on her waist, trailing to her hip as he offered Kenji another glower when he happened to look, which was when Sush whispered, "He's not doing anything, Greg. Take a chill pill."

As if to make a declaration that everyone at the gala the previous night already knew about, Greg left a statement kiss on her temple. Positioning his mouth directly at her ear, he murmured a warning, "If Sophisticated does anything, or tries to, he's going to be castrated and buried six feet underground. Alive. And if you showed the mildest interest, I'm going to tie you to my bed and fuck you in every hole until he's erased from your system. When we aren't fucking, I'll let you handle octopus matters with one hand untied, but I'll be monitoring your server. Very, very closely. Is that understood, my huntress?"

As sick as it was, Sush found herself wanting to be tied to his bed and fucked in every hole until everything was flushed out of her system. He'd already fucked her in every hole the previous night, without the tying part. She wondered if it'd be better with her hands tied. The image conjured up from his words sent a thrill up her spine, and she tried her best to control it this time as Greg's nose stayed close to her hair, challenging her ability to focus,

challenging her to think of saying anything but yes.

Grabbing onto a single thread of thought within her reach, her eyes that had been glued to her device gave her an idea to deflect just so she wouldn't end up flushed in a room full of people. Clearing her throat, she actually sounded matter-of-fact when she asked, "One question: how am I going to run tests from there?"

That caught him off guard, turning his homicidal intentions to logical contemplation. His eyes skimmed the room they were in, sighing to himself, knowing he'd be damned if he took this from her. Eventually meeting her waiting gaze, he vouched, "I'll think of something." Voice taking a defensive edge, he continued, "I look forward to hearing about Sophisticated's joke at lunch. We'll see if his sense of humor is going to end up getting himself killed."

Shaking her head and returning her sights to her device, she murmured under her breath, "Demented animal."

Greg scoffed, dark and alluring, just the way she liked it. "I'm surprised it took you this long to come to that conclusion. See you in a bit. Let me know if you need more coffee or food."

She mm-ed lightly, affectionately, before Greg made his way out, and she swore she saw - from the corner of her eye - Kenji loosening in relief when the door closed behind the duke.