

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

Chapter 7

After illegible signatures were slashed across dotted lines, Lucy demanded, "Where are they?"

"Well," Valor began. "Seeing that I initially sought a postponement, the ones behind the conspiracy aren't her—"

Lucy and Xandar growled, shooting up from their seats once more as their thunderous rumble echoed through the room, at which time every other wolf and lycan stood. The strength of their snarls reverberated through everyone's eardrums, making Abbott and Valor shudder internally.

Their glacial, onyx eyes drained the color out of Valor, and Xandar's voice turned deeper and more threatening than anyone had ever heard when he ordered, "You fucking get them here. In this room. In thirty minutes. Or we *will* invoke Clause 4."

Valor didn't need reminding what Clause 4 was: if the event of breach, the kingdom may hold the commander of hunters hostage until the breach is remedied, subjecting him to any form of treatment the kingdom deemed appropriate. Where the breach remains unremedied within the first month, the defense minister would subsequently be taken hostage.

Turning to Sushmita, who shot him a *what-are-you-waiting-for* look, Lucy prompted in a tone that was no less menacing than her mate's, "Twenty. Nine. Minutes."

Valor's hand shot to his trouser pocket and entered a number on his speed dial. He concentrated on hiding his fidgeting hands and quivering lips as his eyes wandered anywhere but at the primitive monsters in the room, the smallest one now pulled to sit on her husband's lap as they both watched Valor like a hawk.

The standard ringback tone sounded morbid for the first time, like it was prophesying that Valor's pulse on the electrocardiogram would match the cycle of a double beat and then nothing for a few times before the line went flat. God, he hoped the line wouldn't go dead. It was such a bad omen.

Two cycles passed before the recipient picked up, at which time Valor barked for him to round up those under suspension and bring them to the headquarters within twenty minutes. Although aggression was evident in his voice, the slither of fear and panic

coiled in his order was equally apparent. And it pleased Greg, Toby, and Lovelace the most.

Uncomfortable silence unfurled in the room as sweat beaded Valor's forehead and drenched his armpits.

Christian leisurely sipped the bottled water like it was just another break between meeting sessions, though creases of impatience marred his smooth brows spoke for his resentment at the hunters' feeble attempt to break away from the agreement.

At the twenty-ninth minute, the elevator doors had still not opened. The crippling silence was made worse when Greg conveniently chose this time to crack his knuckles, relishing at the way Valor jerked as the commander stood and called the same number, almost turning into a ghost now.

The line went dead.

Valor muttered a curse and dialed again.

Toby casually mentioned they were down to ten seconds.

At that moment, the bell of the elevator chimed, sounding like the extension of Valor's life-pass had been approved when the metal doors parted and the suspended ones were brought in with hands bound behind their backs. Each with two escorts.

The commander released a puff of air and sunk back into his chair. Axel Abbott appeared relieved too, looking less stoned. Giovanni Patterson didn't show much, like it didn't matter if Valor was taken. Sushmita Alagumalai showed close to nothing.

Greg rose from his seat like he was welcoming royalty when - in fact - he was more than ready to kill. Lucy got onto her feet as well as the warriors held the doors open while the hunters brought in their four suspended colleagues.

By his side, Lucy asked, "Any alterations to your request, Greg?" Her voice was softened, encouraging and harmless. Nothing like the way she spoke to Valor. It marked the difference between an ally and a foe, Greg thought. It'd take him a few more years to realize that the tone she'd just used was - in fact - reserved for family.

His onyx eyes never left the six-foot-two hunter with hazel brown hair when he responded in a respectful murmur, "No, my queen. No alterations necessary."

She gave a nod of acknowledgement, took three steps to the wall, knocked twice on it with her knuckles, satisfied with the solid sound that came out before saying, "Line them up here, please. Three feet apart."

One of the escorts took one step forward. "Your Majesty, I thought it was agreed this was to be dealt with in the w—"

Valor cut him off, "Zip it, Johnson. Line them."

Shocked at the hostility, the hunter apologized nonetheless, "Pardon me, Commander."

Johnson was about to move when Xandar uttered, "If you don't say the words I want to hear in the next twenty seconds, you'd be added to this lineup."

Words? He was a hunter, not a mind-reader. How on earth would he know what the lycan king wanted to hear?

It was only when Johnson's dilated pupils and frantic mind began searching did he noticed Xandar's hand covering his queen's small shoulder, stroking it leisurely, lovingly. Only those closest to the royal couple knew Xandar's hand was also to restrict his queen's movement. She may not want or need an apology, but he did.

Johnson cleared his throat and uttered, "I'm sorry for questioning you, Your Majesty."

"No hard feelings," Lucy replied with a cordial smile.

"As long as it doesn't happen again," Xandar warned with the same scowl, which prompted Johnson to nod and bow low in response.

The escorts placed their mouth-taped colleagues against the wall, pinning their wrists and ankles with metal holders that dug into the concrete. The first was the former Chief Octopus, Zasper Xavier, now placed before Xandar; the second was the former Deputy Chief Archer, Sofia Zelasko, now before Christian; the third, the former Chief Chameleon, Seni Intitulada, placed before Lucy; and finally, the one Greg had been waiting patiently to end since the day he killed his mate - the former Deputy Chief Chameleon, Logan Larson.

Larson was a green-eyed six-foot-two with dark hair, square face and thin lips. Broad frame. A more than suitable chameleon. As Greg assessed him, he glowered. Since the hostages' mouths were taped, Larson could only channel the depth of acrimony he had for the duke through his eyes: for fucking his girlfriend then killing her; for turning his colleagues and boss against him; for keeping him isolated from the world in the past four months only to slaughter him now.

As Xandar, Lucy and Christian took their positions, Greg interjected, "Wait." Pivoting to Lucy, he said, "I'd actually prefer to use the glass wall for him."

Ignoring Larson's muffled protests, Lucy asked, "And for the other three?"

"I really don't give a fuck as long as they're dead, my queen."

“Okay.” Facing her prey, her claws extended like a sword from a scabbard when she coolly said, “We’ll be done in a bit and meet you outside.”

“Take your time, my queen. I’m sure Larson and I would love to see this venture to the end.”

“Hm,” Lucy snickered, knowing Greg just wanted to watch his prey suffer and tremble in fear before ultimately killing him. She would too.

Turning back to their own prey, Christian and Xandar delivered swift kills, through their throats and stomachs before breaking their necks, letting the lifeless bodies sag. Lucy’s claws were about to plunge through Seni’s abdomen when the woman’s muffled “please” and stream of tears made Lucy sigh in impatience. Pulling the tape off with force as Seni yelped, Lucy asked in exasperation, “What?”

“Please, Your Majesty. Please. We weren’t lying. There really is someone else, someone calling the shots. Only Izabella knew him or her. That person must have removed all evidence somehow and…”

Lucy cut her off, “What a convenient incident that you’ve had the misfortune of suffering.”

That stupid excuse had been used by every conspirator for months, yet no evidence could be recovered to prove it. The monarchy decided that, whether there was someone else or not didn’t erase the fact that these people were involved in attempting to steal Enora’s blood to be sold in the black market because of its speculated healing abilities that she is suspected to have inherited from her mother.

Before Lucy’s claws went through, Seni exclaimed, “No! I have a child. She’s just turned three. My daughter and husband need me.”

“Oh, I know about your family,” Lucy replied, cold and callous. “And I’m quite sure your daughter would grow up just fine without having you as a role model. The last thing I need is for you to teach the next generation to inject and extract things from our future generation without caring whether they’ll live or die.”

With that, Lucy claws dug into the former Chief Chameleon’s abdomen. Seni’s screams were cut short when Lucy’s claws swiftly swiped all the way up through her chest, throat and head, making this the bloodiest execution thus far. Due to Lucy’s lack of height, some blood splattered on her dress and more got on her face.

Before she could turn to Greg and his victim, Xandar spun her around, a bottled water from the table ready in one hand and a tissue tucked in the other as he gently cleaned the dots of blood off her cheeks, forehead, nose, and jaw, then pecking a kiss on her nose to indicate that he was done and was rewarded with her soft smile and a hushed “thank you” through their link.

Greg got busy, dragging Larson out by his hair that had grown long enough to be tugged. The warriors held the door open for the duke as he hauled the red-face, muffling chameleon until the first glass wall came into view, where he slammed the hunter against.

Larson groaned as Greg held him up by jabbing his claws through the hunter's collar, feeling the tips meeting the glass surface while Larson screamed and muffled a line of curses. Deciding to improvise instead of going ahead with the initial method to end the bastard, Greg made their eyes fuse before smirking darkly, relishing in the hunter's weakened state.

Without warning, the duke crushed Larson's elbows and ankles, broke his limbs, watched him take bated breaths and turn pale, about to pass out. Right before he did, Greg's hand went low, sliding his claws through his penis and testicles, earning another cry.

Rage fueled the duke as he struck Larson's head to the glass, sending him into a daze and breaking the glass that dug into his nape. Taking a broken shard, Greg stabbed it into Larson's throat, watching blood ooze like juice from a fruit. Finally, he tore out the chameleon's rib. One by one. Larson was already dead by the second rib but Greg didn't care. He went on until the last bone was out and snapped. Only then did he let go of the body.

Taking lungfuls of air, he appraised his handiwork while everyone around him remained silent.

Christian found the sequence of his slaughter eerily familiar. Toby and Lucy - when they realized where the steps had come from - turned to Xandar, who was equally stupefied.

When Greg was done and locked eyes with his cousin, he uttered, "Inspiration can come from the most unlikely of places."

His claws retracted and - for some reason - his eyes locked with Sushmita. He didn't know why, but for a brief moment, he felt like they were the only two creatures in the room. Then, her voice permeated through the silence when she asked, "The agreement doesn't state that the kingdom wants the corpses, but are they required, Your Graces, Your Majesties?"

Her voice. Smooth. Silky. Cool and collected. Why hadn't he heard anything like this before? The tone was meant to be flat, he knew. But how did something flat carry its own melody?

"Greg?" the queen's voice tore his mind out of oblivion.

Greg felt stares on him. Knowing he was given the choice, he muttered, "No need. We don't need these bodies polluting the kingdom."

Sushmita pushed a polite smile and asked Lucy and Xandar whether there was anything else they wanted to discuss. There wasn't, so they thanked her - ignored Valor - and called it a day.

On their way back in Xandar's jet, Lucy sank into the seat facing Greg, asked if he was alright - he'd had better days - and whether he could tell Enora about the change in his work schedule starting the following week - of course, how hard could it be?