

## Chapter 84

Valor defended Hazel when Sush and Patterson played the recording then disclosed their suspicions of her. The commander insisted that the Deputy Chief Octopus had only ever remained loyal to the hunters and would be the last person to lie or betray them. Refusing to authorize an immediate freeze over her access to the headquarters files and confiscation of her weapons, Valor "suggested" they look further into the matter and find "more plausible leads". Not even Patterson, who'd been in the commander's good books, could say anything to change his mind.

After that unsuccessful discussion, Greg brought Sush to the archery range, telling her she deserved some time off which she wholly disagreed with at first, until - with eyes twinkling in mischief - he asked, "Are you sure you're not in the mood? I checked the range schedule: it's helium balloons day. Any particular face you want to see there?"

That did it. The next thing she knew, she was giving him directions of a longer route with less traffic, and they arrived at their destination earlier than they would following the direct route.

Greg parked and got out her bow from his boot, making her eye him in suspicion. Unfazed, he explained, "I picked it up around four."

Realization dawned on her. "That's where you went? You said you were picking something up from the residence."

Greg's brows furrowed. He took a look at the bow in his hand and said, "This is from the residence, and I'm assuming this..." he holds the bow a little higher. "... qualifies as being something."

"I thought you meant your thing." Sush's eyes narrowed and took the bow from him.

Before Greg paid the premium rate as Sush queued for arrows on the other side, he asked the man at the counter about the deluxe option being advertised on the wall in big yellow font against a blood red, multi-limb star. The enthusiastic man in a white cap explained the deluxe rate offered a range with more space, was less crowded, and had light snacks along with alcohol. "Still balloon targets?" he asked.

"Yes, of course, sir."

"Perfect. I'll take that rate for two," he said, before handing over his card.

After Greg had gotten the passes from the smiling vendor, he led Sush through the doorway with a hand on her back, but just as she was about to make a right down her usual route, he redirected her, hauling her to the left. "White Cap said it's this way."

"It's usually that way," Sush argued, but followed nonetheless.

The moment she saw a canopy with a crowd of less than fifteen instead of more than thirty, with target segments demarcated by bunting of yellow flags, each segment for each archer three times the size than the one she was used to seeing, and a table with pastries and sandwiches, along with a section for alcohol, her surprised gaze took a fierce twist when her head turned toward Greg, who merely scanned the food options and said, "Oh, look. They have cream puffs. How many would you like?"

Battling an eye twitch, Sush whisper-yelled, "This isn't the premium package!"

"Thankfully. You were right about the crowd. Imagine the noise and sweat stench." He made a look of disgust before his hand left her back as he grabbed a plate, placed two cream puffs into it, saw something green, leaned in for a whiff, then turned back to her and asked, "Do you only take matcha cupcakes or matcha anything, by the way?"

Sush was about to scream at him for changing the subject but the

flames slowly died off when her heart told her why he was doing this and her soul yearned to be closer to him because he was doing this. Sighing in defeat, she responded, "Matcha anything."

He placed two green-colored cream tarts on the plate, then moved down the table. "Bagels?"

"Yes, please."

"How many?"

"One."

"Cream cheese, or homemade peanut butter and granola?"

"The latter."

When he reached the end, he asked, "Anything else I haven't taken that you'd like to have?"

"I think I'll eat those on the plate first."

Going over and taking the filled plate from him, she used the opportunity to leave a kiss on his cheek - one that got him stunned. Her hand fell on his bicep when she gazed into his eyes and muttered, "Thank you."

A dazed smile lifted his lips, and he stole a quick kiss from her lips.

"Those two words are appreciated but unnecessary, my octopus. I need you to be happy. Go pick a table. I'll join you in a bit."

"Wait," Sush glanced at her plate. "We're not sharing?"

Picking up a new plate and placing an archery bow-shaped butter cookie onto his plate before taking a sandwich of each type, he said, "We could if you want to. We'd get to try each of everything that way. Go pick a table. I'll come with the remaining options."

Sush picked a white table and sat, refusing to touch her food until Greg arrived even when her stomach growled at the sight of the peanut

butter and granola just waiting to be spread on her bagel. When he came with two more plates, they dug in. The moment the bagel with her thick-layered spread hit her taste buds, sparks erupted in her being at the impeccable flavor as her toes curled and she spoke between moans, "Whoever made the spread deserves a place in heaven. God! Here, try some."

She brought the bagel to Greg's lips, offering him the unbitten part, but he leaned in and bit off from where she did, taking the pastry and light brown spread topped with nuts and seeds into his mouth, licking off the excess from the corner of his lips as he chewed. Washing it down with the wine, he concurred, "Definitely the second most delicious thing I've eaten."

No words needed to be said for them to know what Greg found most delicious, especially when his eyes conveyed it with the way he looked at Sush with that brief glint when he said those words.


Their moment was only interrupted by loud cheers from the other side after a few balloons popped.



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