

Chapter 85

"Six! That's a new record," one of them said. "He's the best of the best, what d'you expect?" another praised.

It was easy to see that the group of three men and two women were on a corporate gathering, and the one who was being bombarded praises looked like he had everyone under his thumb as he beamed and began his story - probably not for the first time - of how archery was a skill that had been in his family for generations, his grandfather being one of the best in the country and was once best in the world so "he supposed" he inherited the skill in some way, never needing to put that much effort yet still be good at it, at one point saying that he may even be better than a professional hunter, which prompted more ass-kissing from the over-agreeable people around him.

Lilac eyes of mischief locked with Sush's smiling, dark orbs when Greg asked, "What's your record?" He was sure she was better.

"Twenty," she replied, a smirk slowly forming along her lips when she was getting an idea of where he was going with things.

His brows did not raise in surprise, but his lips tilted with pride and arrogance. "How about you show these ignorant amateurs how a real hunter shoots, my love."

Putting away the half-eaten matcha tart and downing half her glass, a competitive tug of her lips beamed with the acceptance of a challenge as she picked up her bow and rented arrows before striding out of the canopy. Greg's eyes followed her every move as he swirled the drink in his hand from where he sat.

Sush took her position 54 yards away from a wooden crate that was placed under another canopy that was much higher than the one they

were under. Plucking out one arrow from the quiver, she fastened it on her bow. When she was ready, her foot stepped on the red button in the ground, at which time the wooden crate opened to release balloons of all colors. Once a balloon disappeared under the dome cap, it was a lost target. She had one minute to shoot as many as she could.

Her arrows came out in ones for the first three shots before it came out in twos. Gasps and oohs came from behind her but those murmurs and subsequent cheers were ones that Sush could neither hear nor see as she continued firing, shooting Valor, Ferdinand, Hazel, and Valor again and again until her time was up.

The shot counter who stood at the midpoint between the balloon canopy and customers' canopy wrote a two-digit number on a board and held it up.

Greg rose from his seat and clapped, shouting, "Fantastically done, my love. That's a new record!"

His enthusiasm was strongly shared by the other shooters who did not belong with the corporate group, all of whom shot up from their seats and clapped as well, men and women alike: some cheered with fists punched to the air, and one even screamed and applauded her feat next to the six-shot shooter on purpose.

Thirty-nine balloons really was a new record. And she'd give full credit to her rage but she had to admit - halfway through - she wasn't even thinking about the people she hated, the ones she wanted to kill, she just wanted to be here, in the moment, to have a little fun. The first half of the arrows must have brought her anger to the balloons because she mellowed out by the second half.

Turning to Greg with a mildly embarrassed smile at the way he was flaunting her skill, calling her his love, she couldn't help the heat that surged to her cheeks as he lifted his glass and tipped it her way, which

drew an even brighter smile out of her.

Striding back to him like she was taking a jog home - her home, they stole a kiss before he congratulated her, with more happiness than haughtiness this time. They spent the next couple of hours there, not knowing when the corporate group left as faces came and went in the small crowd around them, a few dropping by to commend Sush's skill before leaving, saying they hoped to meet her again.

"The deluxe package offers great perks," Greg noted after the third one came with a praise before leaving, his smile hadn't fallen since she put down the half-eaten tart to break her own record.

Eyeing him in askance, she mused, "And I suspect one of those perks is to show off?"

Unabashed, he lifted his glass, clinked it with hers, and replied, "Without a doubt."

Sipping on their drinks, they spent a few quiet moments just being with each other. Greg then noticed Sush's sights flickered to her bow and stayed there for longer than a few moments, contemplation whirling in her eyes, a small smile playing on her lips. Reaching over, his fingers came between hers, feeling the higher voltage course through him when he gently asked, "What is it?"

Sush came out of her thoughts, smiling broader, letting the sides of her fingers brush against his, indulging in the feeling, in the electrical rush, before she nodded at her bow. "It belonged to my uncle."

Greg's brows rose, his eyes darting to the curved piece of wood, thanking Goddess he'd been careful with it. There was no replacing something like this. The almost imperceptible tug of his hand brought his sights back to her, and she continued, "They were Liabilities and had no connection to the hunters whatsoever but archery was a family hobby. Holidays when he was a kid meant men in archery ranges and

women gossiping at the tea tables. It was a different time. I'm the first girl he taught, and the first female in my family to know how to shoot."

His face softened, smile widened. "They would be proud of you."

She scoffed. "I'm not too sure about that." Taking another sip, she explained, "They've always been big on forgiveness. That's where we're not alike, despite our shared blood."

Choosing his next words carefully, he ultimately said, "You don't have to be like them for them to be proud of you, Sush. I'd say it's impossible not to be proud of the strides you've made in your life. As for that... particular venture, you're not really doing it for them, are you? You're doing it for yourself."

"Yes," she admitted in a whisper.

"Then does it matter whether they'd be proud of that segment of your life? If you're proud of yourself going down that route looking for answers, why give a fuck of what anyone thinks?"

"That's what I tell myself on most days," Sush replied. "But on some days, I wonder if it'll even be worth it, whether more harm would come from knowing the truth than not knowing."

"Crossing the line or staring at it forever," he hummed.

"Yeah."

"Has there ever been a line you just stared at and never crossed?" he questioned, though already knowing the answer.

She smiled. "No."

His thumb brushed her fingers, soothing her as best as he could. "We're finding those answers, and we won't rest until we do."

She gazed at their joined hands, letting happiness engulf her at how lucky she was to have met him, to clique with him, to be able to argue

and still laugh with him. "I don't think I tell you this enough, Greg, but having you around just... makes things easier, better. Be it complaining or laughing, I know I have you to turn to, to do all those things with me, without judgment. I mean, you can be a complete asshole at times, but even then... I know I can trust you. With anything."

Greg's lycan rolled over and cooed as his human fought back tears, understanding it as an elaborated version of three simple but powerful words, which he was more than happy to say back after pressing a deep kiss onto her hand. "I love you, too."


They stayed for a few more minutes before leaving in better spirits than when they arrived. In the car, he held onto her hand on his lap, replaying her words over and over again, failing to comprehend how someone like him got a creature this perfect.



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