

Chapter 92

In the trenches, Kenji put on a numb exterior - one he wore everyday as the head of the eastern octopuses. It was the best way he knew of to withstand the stress that came with the job. And in recent weeks, he'd been under a lot of stress. His vulnerable side had only ever been shown to the people he trusted, which were not many to begin with. And this arrangement worked well enough for him to never contemplate on changing.

His numbness projected a firm and tough exterior, one that had always been responded with efficiency and near-perfect delivery of tasks from his subordinates. Like Sush, he wasn't liked by many, but was well respected by most.

When he was not checking or correcting the western octopuses' work, he hung around the mavericks since he didn't know which hunter to trust seeing that Hazel was friendly with everyone.

As he was minding his own business in the test lab, the scanner beeped and in walked Satan's daughter in her impeccable disguise. "Yo! What are you up to?"

He used to be okay with Hazel - didn't like her but didn't hate her either. But after Patterson shared his knowledge about the lie from the hospital, Kenji grew wary. "Test runs," he answered curtly, continuing tapping on his device and watching the simulation unfold, taking notes on parts that required tweaking.

"You haven't been avoiding me, have you?" she asked, undeterred by his indifference, pushing herself up to sit on the empty spot of the table.

Judgment creased his forehead. He refused to meet her gaze as he said pointedly, "You do know test run tables are meant for equipment, right?"

"Ugh, you and Sush are so alike," Hazel groaned and got off.

Kenji had to admit that was true. They were quite alike. It was how they cliqued in the first place, at one time even thinking they shared something more when time showed that they didn't. They were friends - good friends, even, but there was nothing beyond platonic love.

"How do you even do it, though? Be okay with her being with someone else?" Hazel piped.

"By being an adult."

"Meaning?"

"Having the sense to remember why it didn't work and the maturity to move on and be happy for myself and for others."

"Even an ex. Wow."

Kenji offered no response, wanting to ask her to leave, but couldn't since she was technically his boss for the time being. When could he return to the east already?

"You're not gonna ask how I'm doing?"

"You seem better than fine. You'll probably last more than six hours."

"Exactly what I told the docs! But they said not to push it. Leave by the fifth hour, they all said like I didn't hear it the first time."

Kenji mm-ed. For once, he would've preferred sharing a room with the duke than with Hazel. At least he wouldn't be having mindless conversations with a suspected murderer. The fact that she was still here was a joke to the defense mechanics. She should have at least been suspended, he felt.

"Is this because I'm taking Sush's place? Is that why you're like this?"

"I'm always like this, Hazel. Stop making a fuss."

"You're not like this with Sush."

"You're not Sush."

"Is it because you're only nice to the chief and I'm not one?"

Kenji exhaled hard, eyes shut and neck angled for him to face the ceiling like he was sending a desperate plea to the deity. Any deity. "Hazel," he began, voice low. "I'm working. We're all working. You should be working, too."

"You're an ass," Hazel remarked, striding toward the exit while adding in a sing-song voice, "Don't say I didn't try to be your friend."

"Wouldn't dream of it," he muttered. Before learning about her lie, Kenji wouldn't have given Hazel's words another thought. But as she left the room, Kenji's mind wandered.

She was moving about exceptionally well for a person who had been exposed to zahar. The others like her were still stuck at home and worked from home a few hours everyday. Waiting to be left alone in his cubicle, Kenji then waited for Hazel to leave the floor entirely before using his personal tablet to hack into the hospital records. He managed to hack into their systems but - for some reason - hit a wall when he sought to open Hazel's profile, a wall that he didn't immediately know how to break through. And it was strange that there weren't similar walls with the other patients' profiles.

"Yo," the voice from behind him made him jump out of his seat and reflexively let his device fall onto the table face down with a loud thud, garnering attention that he didn't want from the octopuses around him.

Jade seemed unfazed. Kenji wasn't the first hunter he unintentionally spooked. "Need some help with that?"

Kenji blinked. "Do you know how?"

Plucking the tablet out of Kenji's hold, Jade casually said, "Maybe. Maybe not. Let's see." He extracted a thumbdrive-looking gadget from his pocket, inserted into the multipurpose jack below the home screen button, returned to the wall Kenji hit, tapped in a few digits and the impediment disappeared as Jade handed him back the device.

"H-How..." Kenji accepted the tablet but his eyes stayed on the gadget that went back into Jade's pocket. Pointing at his pocket, the eastern

octopus asked, "Where can I get that and how much does it cost?"

Jade lips tugged up. "We made it and it's not for sale."

"Oh."

"But..." Jade continued, gave him a firm pat on the back and said, "If you're nice to the duke, he might make an exception."

"Ah," Kenji was sure that was never going to happen. "I'll just be content marveling at it from afar."

Jade chuckled as Kenji swiped down the hospital records and they skimmed through it together, brows furrowing deeper with each paragraph. Each edited paragraph.

"Man, this bitch got skills," Jade chimed.

"Or the money and network to buy such skills. We have to warn them," Kenji murmured, his mind bringing in something Hazel said earlier - don't say I didn't try to be your friend - it felt like a warning of sorts. Most likely another attack. He just didn't know what it was going to be.

Chapter Comments

