

Chapter 71

In the evening, the official training of the chameleons and octopuses in preparation for them to replace the archers at the borders began. They used the simulator in teams of ten - the maximum number of archers stationed at a particular location. They'd gauge their competencies from there and would eventually work their way down to three - the minimum number on any given team standing guard.

Greg was in the control room behind Patterson, Sush and a recently called-back Millicent who'd been at her post for two days before the massacre happened. Their eyes trained on the chameleons armed with guns and knives in the simulator, dodging and running.

One of them couldn't run fast enough along the running belt making up the floors and slammed against the simulator wall. A team of octopuses went next and their performance wasn't much different. At the end of the session, the general unspoken consensus was that they had a long way to go. Most hunters began to wonder whether their commander and defense minister had to swallow further pride when an extension of the lycan's help was ultimately needed.

Valor lingered around for a bit, saw the first few teams and decided he'd seen enough, telling Patterson and Sush that they needed to "find a way for everyone to pick up an archer's skills quickly".

Sush feigned ignorance and asked if he'd like to give

a demonstration given that he was an archer himself. Valor harrumphed and muttered something about needing to update the defense ministry about their "progress" and disappeared.

In his absence, Patterson uttered, "He'd probably hand in his resignation before stepping foot in the simulator, especially since we'd be out here watching him."

A curve tipped Greg's lips. "Something we can both agree on."

Though less daunted by the duke, Patterson's anxiety with how far his chameleons and Sush's octopuses have to go only allowed him to manage a shake of his head as he left the room to give the chameleons who'd just exited pointers made by everyone who watched them. Millicent and Jason didn't hold back the criticisms, nor did Sush and Patterson, but one person did.

Greg didn't say a word throughout the process, simply leaning against the back wall and watching, ears catching the comments made in the background.

Sush's scribbles were pages long now and Patterson looked five years older just by glancing at the sheer thickness of it, hoping she won't reach the end of the notebook by the end of the day.

As they paused for a break and Sush flipped through the pages, she realized something. Her head turned, eyes meeting the lilac pair and her brows rose. "Is there a reason you haven't said anything?"

They were alone. The rest had gone for a breather.

Greg's stationary posture had an arm folded across his chest and the other elbow resting on the horizontal plane of his arm, fingers resting on his chin and covering his lips like he was physically stopping any words from spilling out.

"Just say it," she said, exhaustion evident from her face and voice.

Greg detached himself from the wall, approaching her. His hands reached the back of her shoulders and thumbs worked their way along her tensed muscles as he reluctantly murmured, "You're all not ready."

"Obviously," Sush huffed, though finding relief in his caress, that was until he said, "I doubt any of you can be within the next year."

"Wait, what?" Her head spun too fast and the sensation of what felt like a snapped vein at her nape had her cursing as she winced.

A sharp breath of air left Greg's nostrils as his animal reprimanded him, blaming him for her momentary anguish. His thumbs shifted their attention along her nape, looking for the tightness before smoothening it. "That was my fault. I apologize."

"No," she began. "Your fault was for not speaking up when the rest of us were firing insults."

"Comments."

"Offensive comments - insults. Come on, tell me. I never thought you'd need permission to speak." She spun herself around in her swivel chair to face him, making his hands that were at her nape hang mid-air before they fell to his side.

His lilac eyes went to the simulator and he said, "Well, firstly, their physiques are off. That's why at least one on each team got thrown at the wall. I'm surprised there weren't more. Another thing is the simulation itself. Sush, they're not very... practical."

Her head tilted, eyes enlarged and shone to comprehend. "Meaning?"

His hand reached for her face, thumb trailing down her jaw as he explained, "The simulation is training them to fight off thugs that come in a gang of five to ten, or lycans and wolves in some instances. That's not the immediate enemy." Sush remained silent, so Greg continued, "The immediate enemy either operates alone or is a team that only uses a single member to intrude. It's an enemy who knows your systems and inventories. If you and Patterson intend to get them and yourselves ready, perhaps energy should be directed toward how the hunters should retreat or - even better - attack their single assailant who can kill them with nothing more than having access to the hunters' sprinklers system or knowing that metal walls could encase an entire floor. I understand this is the standard training procedure of the archers but without the eastern and western threats neutralized, training the chameleons and octopuses like archers would only kill them the way the archers had been killed. Consider narrowing the scope of training for now. You can start all this..." he waved at the empty simulator. "...step-by-step, tedious, all-encompassing archer training when you have time to spare. I wouldn't recommend it at present."

Taking in his words, pondering hard on the things she was going to recommend discarding, the familiar

warm and callous hand cupped her cheek, lifting her face. Guilt impaired his features, his stomach knotted as his brows drew together, lips downturned as his thumb traced the length of her jaw once more when he said, "I should have phrased that with less... judgment."

Sush blinked, not knowing what the hell he meant. The confusion was quickly replaced with a flare of irritation. "Greg, we were all judging. We've phrased things more harshly than you did. Safety before diplomacy. I honestly feel like strangling you for keeping that to yourself. The logic is so obvious. We should have seen it. And you didn't say anything when we didn't see it!"

"Hm," his face softened, a ghost of a smile coming up as his fingertips trailed down her neck, his thumb tracing the middle of her throat. "So you want to get back at me - strangle me - for the misalignment in our critical vigor, is that it?"


"Are you admitting it's your fault, that you weren't being hard enough on us, on me?" she challenged, her tone and the glint in her eye sent blood straight to his groin.

He smirked, his grip tightening on her neck. "Was I not being hard enough on you?"

His thumb traced her lower lip, edging toward the middle, coaxing her lips to part, which they did. Her tongue glided across his thumb, the mere sight of it darkened his eyes and the sensation elicited a growl. He leaned in and smashed his lips on hers, savoring her taste, drowning in her moans as a hand palmed her breast and the other rested on her nape to angle her head.

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As the aroma of her need took over the room and her mouth left his for air, he sucked on her neck, murmuring against her skin, "I thought I could wait until tonight." That made two of them. "But I need you clenching around my cock. Now."

"What happens if I say no?" Sush whispered.

Pulling away from her neck, taking his warmth and kisses with him, he leveled his eyes with her, seeing the hunger and need that mirrored his own when he uttered, "Then you're to be blamed for our miseries."

A taunting smirk lifted her lips. "Denying accountability?"

"Warning you of the consequences."

"Sounds dire."

"It is."

"Better safe than sorry, then."



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