

Chapter 35

Greg walked into the headquarters the following week mentally rehearsing the way he was going to phrase the question of asking Sush whether his presence was impeding her peace of mind. The question then arose as to when he should ask it. Sooner would be more appropriate, more gentlemanly, more respectful.

But he knew himself.

His track record did not display a good line of appropriate or gentlemanly behavior. Respect was another matter, unless someone pissed him off. He decided that - unless Sush flinched, jerked, or outright said that he was making her uncomfortable - he wouldn't raise the matter.

It was a dirty way to buy time, he knew. But he only had three months with her and was not going to prematurely shorten it.

She didn't entertain him with a chat when he greeted her in the morning, merely greeting back. That was when Greg noticed something - the smell of frangipanis and lime wafting off her seemed a little stronger than usual, making him linger there a little longer before pulling himself away and dragging his perplexity with him. Convincing himself that it may just be a higher concentration of perfume for the day, he willed his eyes back to work, not knowing that Sush never wore perfume.

The hours dragged on until around mid-day, when Sush appeared at Greg's station. He'd chosen to sit there more often than anywhere else that the inventory folks got him a permanent desk and chair. This part of the trenches offered him the most unobstructive view of the chief, so he'd always find himself back here no matter how far he went.

Her palm landed on his desk to get his attention when she said, "Any

plans this afternoon? I'm headed to the defense ministry."

He didn't need her palm there to announce her presence. Her scent - that was still stronger than the previous week like a perfume that didn't wear off throughout the day - was already a headline. Her hand on his desk only made his mind venture along thoughts of taking it and pulling her in, to make her stumble and fall into him before he'd hold her on his lap.

Shutting his eyes and turning away as he heaved a sigh, disgusted with himself, he replied, "No plans. Meet you there."

Her palm left the table. But she didn't. "Did something happen?"

Not trusting his mind not to wander the way it shouldn't, he kept his eyes closed and answered, "Lots of things happened."

"Namely?"

"Things you already know. Things from the past four months."

"You're derailing."

"I know."

There was a stretch of silence as Sush checked her own attire, wondering if it was because of her that his eyes had to remain shut. She was in a pantsuit - the same thing she wore on the conspirators' execution day. He didn't seem to have any problems looking at her then. "Look, whatever it is, remove it from your system. I need your head clear and alert at the ministry."

"Will do. See you later," he uttered, feeling her leave before letting his eyes open, telling himself to think about anything but caging her in his arms.

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When it was time to leave for the ministry, Greg stepped out of the

elevator opening to the underground parking lot only to find Sush waiting by his car with arms crossed, back leaning against the wall with one foot up against the gray concrete.

His right brow rose, his way of asking, "Yes?"

In response, she uttered, "I couldn't unlock my car. Some hacker got into the system and tampered with the motion sensors. When I unhacked it, I found the tires deflated. All four of them. So I need a ride while the octopuses go through the surveillance footage of the parking lot."

Suspicion poured over Greg at the hacking AND tire-deflation. His gaze turned to her car across the parking lot, forehead creased. If she had gotten into that car and hit the road, she could've gotten hurt, or worse.

Her voice from the side chimed, "If you're not comfortable carpooling, I'll just call an—"

"Get in," Greg ordered as he unlocked his vehicle, and the doors of the driver's and passenger's seat lifted like a pair of wings. He'd set for the passenger's side to open automatically for Enora's sake.

It was a hassle having to go to the driver's side, push a button, wait for the passenger's door to open, then buckle his sweetheart in. He tried putting her through the driver's seat but she'd grown up so fast that he hit her head once and never used the shortcut again, even though the pup said it only felt like a brush. He checked for bruises and bulges multiple times that day, even asking the queen whether there were any that night, and the queen had to remind him that although pups healed slower, they still healed. If there was nothing during the day, there wasn't anything that night. And there wasn't. Lucy and Xandar checked as soon as Greg brought Enora home and apologized to them.

Sush and Greg got in and buckled up as the doors closed. While starting the engine, Greg asked, "Who else knows you're headed for the

ministry today?" He checked his own car system and made sure everything remained in top shape before putting it to drive.

"Valor definitely knows. I copied him in those emails. Abbott, too. Since it concerns an archer."

"That's it? You didn't tell anyone else before you left? Do the octopuses know where you are right now?"

"Well, I obviously had to tell Hazel. She's in-charge until I get back."

"And chameleons? Does Patterson know?"

"Well, I didn't tell him, but I can't say the same for Valor. He treats the Chief Chameleon like a brother when Patterson is only interested in kissing the ass of whoever's on top."

"Do they know I'm joining you?"

"Nope." That explained the soundness of his vehicle. She went on, "I didn't want them to make me run through a bunch of diplomatic applications and approvals that'd take God knows how long to file and process. Besides, the treaty clearly states the kingdom can demand getting involved in anything concerning security in these three months."

His lips twitched, a teasing voice carried a hint of flirt when he uttered, "I don't recall making this particular demand."

Head swung to him, she snapped, "Do you want to scorch the answer out of them with me or not?"

Pressing back the curl of his lips, containing his amusement as his animal cackled, he said, "Apologies, Chief. Thank you for seeing through the demand I must have forgotten making via telepathy."

Ignoring the sarcasm, she waved a hand. "It's nothing. And it's not as if they don't expect me to drag someone along. I've already informed the ministry that another member of the team will be joining me today."

"Another member of the team." Greg contemplated her choice of words. "And am I correct to assume you didn't mention who that member is?"

"Yep."

A light chuckle left him, one that made her heart do that... jumping, vibrating thing. "You're misleading them," he deduced.

"No," her index finger came up, the gesture reining back her control over her heart as she argued, "I'm helping them improve their efficiency by bypassing procedures that impair it, especially after they ghosted my email, saying they need more time to find the file pertaining to the issue. The Monica Upshaw thing just started last month. How deep can a recent file be buried? A monkey would be able to locate it in under an hour."

Beaming like the rays of light penetrating through the windshield, he asked, "Should we drop by at a zoo to pick one out then?"

"The nearest one is an hour's drive from headquarters in the opposite direction. It's too late for that."

Greg's lips curled all the way up and it became contagious. Sush found herself looking, her eyes softening. Over the past week, she'd gradually come to terms that he was beguiling without a smile, but only now did she realize he was drop dead gorgeous with one. It was like a gift that already looked enticing on the outside and even more so when it had been unwrapped. Where the beguiling side of him elicited the non-filtered part of her to say anything that came to mind, this gorgeous side of him silenced her and made her still, enticing her to admire the view she didn't often get to see, not wanting to miss a sight so rare.

"Sush?" he threw her a glance, concern varnishing his eyes.

She blinked. "What?" He must have caught her looking. Oh, God. She was even smiling, noticing her lips curled only after she'd blinked, and the thought tinged a soft pink on her cheeks.

Greg felt her stare on him, and - even through his peripheral vision - he could tell it was the first time she looked at him that way, like nothing else around them mattered. If he didn't say something soon, he was going to stop the car and do something he'd regret - grab her hand, grope her body, kiss her lips. Goddess, the thought of kissing her did something to his groin that he almost groaned. His grip on the steering wheel tightened as he fought the urge to touch her everywhere. Thank Goddess humans couldn't smell arousals the way lycans did.

Thinking of something quickly, he'd ask if there were any updates on the surveillance footage from the parking lot yet. Her cheeks gained a certain color as she ransacked her bag for her tablet to check for emails, and he bit his inner lip knowing he wasn't the only one fighting this pull between them.

But if his reason for staying away was because of his former mate, what was hers?



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