


The Indomitable Huntress And The Hardened Duke

Stinas Pen

16:05 

Chapter 10

“Chill, man,” Patterson muttered, tearing his lustful gaze off Lucy and only stealing glances now and looking away when the king’s murderous gaze scorched his eyes.

The hunter to his right was Axel Abbott - Chief Archer. He was a broad-framed six footer with short black hair that stood like small spikes, though his personality was anything but spiky. His arms remained crossed over a forest green shirt as he leaned back into his chair, but his shaking left leg under the table gave away his anxiety, one he hoped that only his colleagues could see but didn't know was a faint sound that every werewolf and lycan could hear.

The constant thud thud thud was already driving Greg insane, and his animal asked whether they could just rip off the hunter’s leg already.

Axel Abbott had never been much of a talker as Lucy, Toby and their fellow gammas recalled. He just stood there like a loyal guard, nodding curtly or giving one-sentence responses when asked a question. Some even labeled him as being discriminatory when he shelled up with wolves but opened up with his fellow hunters and huntresses. Axel was careful with who he mingled with, never saying more than he thought was

necessary. Do more, talk less was his motto. Fitting for an archer, as Valor always put it.

Finally, the only woman among the three who had to drag their asses back in was the leader of the octopuses - Sushmita Alagumalai. A six-footer with brown skin, dark brown eyes and square face, dark hair bunched into a low ponytail that reached her upper back, where the ends curled in all directions. A bright pink, worn-out headband sat on her head, tucking in the smaller curls that threatened to spring free. On her neck sat a gold chain necklace weighted by a locket of the same color.

About time, Lucy thought. She knew Sushmita from her days as gamma and always felt this huntress had the most sense. Sushmita fought for the benefit of hunters, but she was the only octopus who refrained from disregarding the interests of wolves during mediations. She'd been in the shadows for sometime when less worthy octopuses took the lead and snatched credit for her ideas, her solutions, her responses.

More than once, while Lucy was in a heated discussion with the Chief Octopus and he or she went speechless, feigning a look of contemplation with furrowed brows, she'd seen Sushmita scribble something on her notepad before pushing it to her superior, who'd then glance over it and replied in accordance to the contents on the note. More than once, the chief read the scribbles without

understanding what it meant, which would be when Lucy and her fellow gammas turned their attention to the actual person she was debating with as the gamma of gammas asked, "What?"

Sushmita would try to hide a smile - secretly taunting her own head of division - and she'd continue the discussion on behalf of her superior from there, only stopping when she didn't have authority to decide for their side, reluctantly turning to her leader for the okay.

Toby used to say Sushmita was the only brain the hunters had and joked that if they were to abduct her, it'd crumble the hunters' operations overnight. It was an exaggeration, of course, but he and Lucy would begin fantasizing about plucking Sushmita out - just temporarily - whenever they wanted an easy win against the hunters. There were times they were mad at Sushmita for her rebuttals and propositions but - more often than not - they could live with the middle ground she'd eventually reach with the wolves.

Greg's eyes trailed from Sushmita's unruly curls to the over-conspicuous pink headband, taking note of the way she leaned forward just slightly, her arms folded inwards at her elbows that were anchored on the table. Her eyes were a dark wall, giving away nothing. And unlike her archer colleague, her leg was definitely not fidgeting. Thank goddess.

Sushmita was studying him as well, knowing that the

duke was the main reason for this meeting that the king and queen fought tooth and nail for. Taking in his partially onyx eyes on his sharp face and pitch black hair, a concave nose above the full set of lips - a look that broke hearts, she wondered if he'd broken that many hearts to deserve this one hell of a heartbreak.

Sushmita had seen him only once when he came to surprise Izabella with a visit. The Chief Octopus and many others had a hard time guessing what Izabella had accomplished to deserve the undivided attention of such a powerful figure that was known to be closed-off and practically allergic to commitment.

Izabella was not a hustler. She'd do the bare minimum and sweet talk her way through the rest of the task. Nobility was an intangible idea that she fancied, not a trait that she possessed. And whether that now dead chameleon was smart was up for debate. It was an odd fit with the duke but - as one of her colleagues chimed like a broken record - the mate bond triumphed over all logic. Many had been secretly happy that Izabella was killed because... well, not many liked her to begin with, especially not the octopuses, whom Izabella had little, if any, respect for.

In Izabella's defense, some octopuses called her a beauty with no brains, which was not objectively accurate. So her hatred towards their group could be seen as a justified response.

Sushmita felt neither happy nor sad when the news of the chameleon's death reached them, thinking that Valor would have to filter the rest of the chameleons. But the moment most of the former chiefs and deputy chiefs were found to be involved in the Delilah Conspiracy, thus were suspended with immediate effect, Sushmita was called up to handle all correspondence and public statements regarding the issue.

And she cursed. Day and night. And she didn't care when the rest of the hunters gave her disapproving looks. Half of them thought her outbursts was justified, so who fucking care what the other half thought?

Sushmita had never spent so many hours scrutinizing her own drafts and replies to emails that were signed by both Xandar and Lucy but which at least sixty percent sounded exactly like Lucy, who had an eye as sharp as an arrow and brain as crafty as a fox. The threats within those lines were new, so the huntress wagered that was the king's doing, and she was right. It was.

Sushmita normally thought Lucy was actually born a fox rather than a wolf and hated every fucking chameleon, archer and octopus that were involved in the fucking shit with Izabella that Sushmita now had to clean up. The huntress respected the gamma-turned-queen but this woman really had to start contributing to the cost of coffee she had to down to

stay more alert than usual these past four months.

She felt Greg's eyes sear into her skin and guessed that he'd been briefed about who had really been carrying this cluster fuck of an issue. Valor was just the one with the final say, who Sushmita had been constantly arguing with about solutions and corresponding consequences.

When Valor said he'd sent word to the lycans and werewolves that the meeting would be postponed and he used "an urgent matter" as an excuse, Sushmita blew up, telling him to be ready to watch his family slaughtered and his house burned to the ground and prepare himself when the lycans' and wolves' wrath spread until no hunter was safe. Needless to say, she was the least surprised when the lycans and wolves barged in.

But she was surprised that the guards outside remained alive and nothing and no one was burned to the ground. Yet. Maybe they'd burn something later, she thought.

The dark circles under her eyes didn't bother her. But what was coming next strained her, mentally and psychologically. She was on her second cup of coffee before noon and had only Izabella and her pals to blame for the predicament she was now ordered to defend. Defend fucking idiots. One of whom had the easy way out - death.

At times like these, Sushmita would wonder why she

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even became a huntress in the first place. Sigh.

But she knew exactly why she was here. There was only one reason holding her from leaving, and after seeing that through, she'd be out of the door and these bozos would deal with their own shitshow.



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