

The Indomitable Huntress And the Hardened Duke

Chapter 23

Gaze pivoting to Greg, Sush began, "Good morning, Your Grace. What is it about rainbows that bothers you?"

His eyes narrowed and his head shook slightly like he was saying, "Don't you dare go there."

Swallowing a chuckle but unable to hold back a smile that lit up her face, she got to the point, "What do you need?"

His brows raised ever so slightly, confusion marring them. "What makes you think I need something?"

"Well, you don't strike me as the type to enjoy small talk."

"Perceptive. And true." A hint of a smile threatened to tear down the facade he held up. "So am I correct to assume it's not customary for hunters to greet each other in the morning?"

Without missing a beat, Sush's sardonic switch came on. "Yeah, we prefer to do it at night."

A hunter, whose seat wasn't far from where they were, spurted his water and choked, turning around to cough and block out the laughter, droplets drizzling onto the cement floor. While most eyes, including Hazel's, remained on the choking hunter, Greg closed in on Sush's ear and whispered, "We do 'it' at night too, some better than others."

His breath skated over her skin, the warmth doing something to her senses, permeating through the shell of her ear and

traveled to other parts of her body.

Her head spun, meeting the glint in his eyes. She recognized that look - one that issued a challenge, one that wasn't going to back down. Since she had been genetically programmed to hate losing, her arms folded across her chest and posture straightened as she mocked ignorance of the innuendo, asking, "And how would some convey a morning greeting better than others, Your Grace? I'm afraid I'm not familiar with deviations. It's quite standard in the human world."

As hard as Greg tried to keep his exterior stiff with crossed arms and a straightened spine, unintentionally mimicking her stance, his lips were getting increasingly difficult to flatten. Something in her words tickled his lycan and his amusement was getting out of hand.

But it was as if they were having too much fun too soon.

From the side, Hazel chimed, "Maybe they just howl to each other?"

In an instant, his humor was snatched, his face hardened again. Ignoring Hazel, he unilaterally decided to change the subject, asking Sush, "Do you have a lunch date with your noble leader today?"

Sush tried not to smile. She didn't want to jinx it. "No, so don't do or ask him anything that'll require me to do that."

"Hm," Greg hummed. "I'll see you at the cafeteria later, then."

"Really?" Hazel's eyes bulged, shining so much that it held several stars. "We get to sit with you?"

Greg's brows arched like Hazel was going mad, until Sush explained, "Hazel and I normally eat together, so congratulations, Your Grace. You just scored yourself the most entertaining lunch partner the octopuses have to offer."

Turning to Hazel with immense difficulty like the screws on his neck had suddenly turned rusty, Greg said, "Apologies, Deputy. I was only speaking to the chief."

"But I'm great company! Right, Sush?"

"Oh yeah," Sush replied nonchalantly, tapping on her tablet, then added more enthusiastically, "She's very great company. She might even be generous enough to buy you lunch." Greg threw her a not-helping look.

"Oh, yes! That reminds me: what's your choice of beverage, Your Grace?"

Greg clicked his tongue. "I'm going to pretend you didn't ask that. Excuse me, I should head back to work." Turning to Sush, he speedily murmured, "If she shows up at my lunch table, you owe me bagels and coffee."

"I don't recall that clause being in the treaty," she muttered back.

"I'll submit a formal application to the queen to work something out, if need be."

It was a joke. They both knew it was a joke, and yet the mere mention of Lucy made Sush flinch and hiss, "Quit getting your mother of the kingdom to keep me awake. Do you have ANY idea how little sleep I got having to deal with her and her

husband?"

His heart constricted for a moment, a modicum of guilt slithered its way into him. but he still managed to say, "I look forward to hearing it over lunch without any..." Greg glanced at Hazel, and continued, "...warning signals present."

Striding away before Hazel got the cheerful "see you later" greeting out, Greg invaded the correspondence circle and reached for a random file, pulling a chair and began flipping through, disregarding the sudden jerks and subsequent silence of fear permeating the department.

They'd get used to him.

Eventually.

Half of his brain was replaying his conversation with Sush, convincing itself that she was a potential ally. He'd asked her to join him for lunch without thinking, which never happened before. Yes, he'd asked for a brief, private meeting with potential allies and followers but it was always done with thought. Sush was the first exception.

The plan this morning was simply to greet her and walk away, yet when it was time to move, he didn't. His legs just didn't carry him. He didn't understand why. He wasn't even like this with Izabella. Come to think of it, he'd found it harder to walk away from Enora than Izabella, even when the bond was still intact. Sush was a different case, though. He couldn't even walk away when he thought he should. It was her deputy that made leaving the section easy.

Setting the incongruence of his action aside, Greg talked himself into believing that he'd scouted talents of all sorts for decades, so the thing with the chief back there was simply him acting on instinct. Spotting an ally became second nature to him so he didn't have to think before asking for the routined brief meeting. With that, he diverted most of his attention to the next file.

Most.

A part of him reserved his remaining attention for a certain huntress that his eyes seemed to find every few minutes.



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