

The Indomitable Huntress And The Hardened Duke

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Chapter 19

Exiting the elevator, Sush drew in a greedy lungful of air. She loved the smell of the trenches, which she wasn't sure whether was odd. Even before she was chief, her senses loved it here.

She didn't like the politics, the gossip, the need to please the higher-ups, but the work? God, she loved the work. She especially loved inventing things and tweaking inventions, drawing immense satisfaction from bringing her imagination to life, running tests, finding solutions to problems, improving designs and modifying structures. This was her place, her escape. Sure, there were bad days but even those days had good stuff in it.

It was sad that she'd have to leave once she'd avenged her mother. It was the main reason she stayed, she felt - to linger around long enough to be entrusted with every piece of information within the headquarters. Deep down, she knew she'd love to stay forever if she could. But she couldn't have it both ways. It wouldn't be wise or feasible to stay by the end of her plan, unless she wanted multiple bullets to her head.

Turning her attention to the email for the Monica

Upshaw issue, she found that orders came from the Administrative Division of the defense ministry. Valor wasn't kidding. This was very high-up.

Sush worded a draft and chose not to hit the "Send" button just yet, knowing from experience that sending something unretractable when she was fit with rage would do herself no favors. She only leaned back into her swivel chair for two peaceful seconds before a deep voice came from her side, "Chief?"

Good God, she thought in frustration.

Her eyes snapped open. Greg held a brown paper bag and a cup of iced latte, setting both on her desk. "Are you a latte person?"

Eyes trailing to the cup with condensed vapor lining the exterior, she curtly said, "No."

Taking the cup away, he said, "Good. I'll just dump this in the trash."

"Is the latte supposed to be a bribe?"

Visibly annoyed, he replied, "I don't know. Ask Traffic Cone."

It took her exhausted brain a moment to realize he meant Hazel. Her turned down lips now crept upward and she had to press them into a line so that she didn't smile and burst out laughing.

Greg's gaze went to her moving lips, a rush of... something overtaking him. Shutting his eyes to refocus, he then uttered, "I admire your ability to find humor in any situation, Alagumalai. But I really don't see any in this one. Tell her to fucking do her job and stop."

"I already have. You can always issue a formal complaint with HR. Oh wait, you're in their department today. Maybe you could file your own complaint."

"Will she be suspended, then fired?"

"Well, not necessarily. It still has to go through the discipl—"

"Fucking dammit," he murmured.

She knew he was pissed. She knew she shouldn't find any of this amusing. But here she was. Struggling not to laugh. The duke could make Valor shrivel so well yet found Hazel insurmountable.

Her sights went to the paper bag. Pushing herself up and placing it on her lap, she opened it and asked, "What did she get you? Oh, two bagels and cream cheese. Hm. Strange. It's not what she usually eats."

"I was told it's what you usually eat," Greg clarified. She paused, stunned. His lilac eyes met her inky ones. In the pocket of silence, his brows converged when

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he added, "If the barista in the cafeteria named Nancy lied to me, she's going to be my second complaint for the day. And I'll be demanding a full refund of my money."

Coming out of the brain freeze, Sush glanced at the bagels, cleared her throat and uttered, "She didn't lie to you. And Nancy is a sweetheart. Leave her out of your agenda." Looking at the bagels again like they might disappear and affirm the version of reality that she was used to - one where no one bought her food, she then questioned, "Why are you bribing me with bagels? What do you want?"

"Consider this a thank-you for the smooth access to just about everything in your trenches thus far. If you can keep Traffic Cone out of my zone, your lunch is on me for the next three months."

Not one to say no to free food, especially not her favorite food, she got out a bagel and bit into it when she said, "Hazel's not that bad."

"Her hair itself is a warning sign." His arms folded as he leaned against her desk.

Sush scoffed, the corner of her lip titling up. "I should let her know you don't like iced lattes. What did you drink at lunch today?"

Greg's eyes snapped to her in askance. Voice deep,

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serious, he uttered, "Don't you dare give her any ideas."

She shrugged. "Maybe I just want to bribe you back? You look like the type to take your coffee black."

"So what's your point? If it matches my soul, I take it."

"Same here," Sush mumbled between chews, her attention stolen by her lit up screen, which was when Greg took the opportunity to let his face soften, observing her face, watching her jaw move in a rhythm.



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