

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 101 - Tips

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Since verifying the presence of children didn't concern Greg, he moved on to what really interested him when he asked Toby, "Minister, did she give any descriptions of the three scientists?"

"No. With hindsight, I wished I had asked."

Lucianne gently consoled, "You had a lot on your mind."

Tate added, "And she might not even know, Toby."

Toby begged to differ. "It's really nice of you to want to help defend my mate, Alpha, but let's face it, if she's privy to planning the Blue Crescent attack and the abductions at Falling Vines and Saber Vagary, I doubt she won't know who the scientists are."

Greg muttered, "The number 'three' is quite peculiar."

Toby had an exhausted look when he asked, "What does that mean, Your Grace?"

Greg explained, "Most scientists don't play well with others, so most work alone, and come up with close to nothing in their lifetimes. This is with the exception of Dr Tanish and Madam Psych, but they never worked with anyone beyond themselves."

Xandar questioned, "Is it possible that those working solo have altered their working style, Greg?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. It depends on what they're being guaranteed."

Lucianne asked, "What would swing the odds in our rival's favor?"

Greg thought about that and uttered, "Power. That would be my best guess, My Queen."

Toby wasn't even trying to think anymore. "What? Everyone wanted to vacuum the Authority out of Lucy?"

The duke's mouth opened intending to deliver the usual harsh retort, but the sight of the tired and saddened minister made Greg feel a little bad, so he chose to answer cordially, "Power in status was what I meant, minister. Everyone wants to be in the highest position, to be untouchable, to overthrow the one who sits on the top spot so that they'll be the one to make the rules."

"Oh. Of course," Toby noted casually like he heard about a revolution every single day to the point where he was jaded.

Lucianne asked, "What do they even want with that power? Why are they so pinned on being untouchable? They're rogues. They already have more leeway than anyone in the kingdom...as long as they do anything to go against your rules, of course."

This made Xandar ask, "What are your rules, Greg?" Maybe they weren't as flexible as they thought.

Greg shrugged and explained innocently, "Nothing complicated. Just don't do anything to piss me off, which can range to something as simple as becoming intolerably loud in a bar I'm in, to something more complicated like planting a mole in my circle."

While everyone processed this in silence, Xandar commented, "That's a very wide range of subjective circumstances, Greg."

Greg countered, "Says the one who came up with the complicated tax system to suck money out of individuals based not just on earnings, but properties, business, shareholding, foreign income, investment, and let's not forget the exemption only for people who can claim family support, child support, and a whole list of other things that would take me days to recite! And what's with that tax-exemption incentive about some history sh*t?"

In defense, Xandar argued calmly, "Research and publication of historical events that have been buried or burnt by our lycan predecessors is useful because we'd be able to gauge the best approach to take when we're with the other species. It helps the kingdom as a whole in the sense that it preserves peace without being taken advantage of. Of course there'll be a tax exemption for the time and money that goes into anything like that."

Christian also added, “And that whole list of things you’re complaining about isn’t placed there to target anyone in particular, Greg. It isn’t personal, so it’s not subjective. It’s just economics, unlike your rules which are strongly based on emotions – your emotions.”

Greg responded without effort, “I’m level-headed most of the time, so I doubt involving my emotions is a problem, distant cousin. It really isn’t that hard to avoid pissing me off. Just do as I say, stay out of my way, answer questions when I ask them, and don’t conspire against me. It’s that simple.”

Christian heaved a heavy sigh and threw his hands in the air before he decided to just give up trying to explain how that whole ‘simple’ thing was a problem. Xandar was not very surprised by whatever he heard. Apart from Greg’s lack of birthright, the whole dictatorial line the duke just recited was the reason why Xandar was determined to never let Greg take the throne.

Lucianne decided to get the subject back on track. “Greg, do you happen to have a list of creatures who...aren’t happy to do as you say, stay out of way, answer your questions and not conspire against you?”

Somehow, the way Lucianne recited the whole list in the sequence Greg said it earned a few soft chuckles and made some of the judgmental faces turn into ones of amusement. Desmond snorted and abruptly stopped when Greg’s fierce eyes went to him.

Lucianne prompted, “So, there IS a list, Desmond?”

“Queen, ain’t no list needed. Almost anybody with an ego and who ain’t workin’ for boss don’t like doin’ those things. And it ain’t personal. These folks just don’t like being bossed around, ya know?”

“That’s...understandable, I suppose.” Her sights returned to Greg when she asked, “So, which scientists are the most...rebellious ones, Greg? Surely, they can’t all be certain that they can overthrow you.”

He was definitely flattered by her confidence in his ability to keep the rogues in line, and couldn’t help but smile before he answered, “I haven’t had a problem with self-proclaimed geniuses for more than two decades, My Queen. The last ones were...”

That was when it hit him.

His eyes went to his top four, who were lost for a brief moment before they too realized who they were looking for. It made sense! The Callow triplets were the only ones who worked in three, the only scientists who defied Greg by spreading tales about how he was not fit to stay on the top of the rogue chain, the only ones who died without leaving corpses.

Lucianne squeezed Xandar's hand tightly to cope with the painful silence. She didn't want to interrupt their thinking process but the wait was an ordeal! Christian and the alliance members weren't doing any better.

It was like the royal mavericks were discussing amongst themselves but that couldn't be possible seeing that their eyes were clear so they weren't mind-linking. It really looked like they were having an internal discussion just by using their eyes. Lucianne even began to wonder whether she and the alliance members could do that after fighting alongside each other for so many years.

After the royal mavericks recalled the last time any one of them mentioned the name 'Callow' in their own investigation, Greg scoffed darkly before he muttered with a sinister smile, "Those bastards are going to die for real this time."

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After Toby left the beach, Gerella ran as fast as her legs could carry her back to Neptune's hideout. She was still amazed by how close the two rogues were that Neptune was allowed to set up his own hiding place on Klementine's land.

Gerella began cracking her head on a plausible excuse for them to evacuate as soon as possible. She came to an abandoned hut, went to the back where there was a worn out truck, slipped underneath the vehicle and slid open the metal casing covered by dirt and dried leaves before sliding into the hideout.

Her eyes scanned the significantly smaller space, looking for Saxum.

Neptune saw her frantic look, so his head gestured to a room behind a tattered curtain as he uttered calmly, "There. One of your friends has fallen ill."

Fallen ill? Now?

She barged into the room without an invitation, and she saw Delancy, who Saxum dated on and off, lying flat on the rubber mattress on the floor with her eyes closed. Her face was pale, as were her lips. Regina and Chong were there, as well as the only hybrid with medical knowledge – Zepine.

Before Gerella could ask what happened, everyone felt their napes sting before it turned into a burn. The anguish spread from their napes to the rest of their bodies. It felt like their organs and vessels were being squeezed before the pain found its way to their hearts, and that was excruciating enough to bring them to their knees.

Gerella could hear the hybrid children screaming in pain, but she couldn't even get up to go help comfort them. She was drenching in cold sweat by enduring the pain herself.

Only when the papilio marks vanished entirely from their napes did the torment come to an end. The kids were still crying and screaming while the adults took heavy breaths. Normally, Gerella placed the children first, but since she was still struggling to stand from the burn and internal constriction, her eyes locked with Regina and Chong when she asked between breaths, "What...happened?"

Chong recovered first, so he began explaining, "Delancy was creating an inventory of food supplies with me, and she just fainted all of a sudden. I brought her here and linked Zepine and Saxum before we realized that...the mark on her nape was already gone."

"She didn't scream, sweat, or shiver? Nothing?"

With a shake of his head, Chong muttered, "Nothing."

Gerella's panicked sights went to Saxum, who was holding onto Delancy's lifeless hand as he held back tears. No one had ever seen Saxum cry, and only Delancy had ever made him smile.

Although Gerella knew Saxum wanted space and silence, the fact that the authorities would be coming for them soon made her forget about being empathetic. If they didn't leave soon, they'd all wished they ended up like Delancy.

Her mouth opened and she lied beautifully through her teeth after the ten times she practiced in her head before she reached the hideout, “Saxum, we need to evacuate. I smelled something when I was in the forest, and tracked it to the beach. There wasn’t anyone but there were fresh footprints on the sand.”

Saxum was still staring at the only woman he loved, but he heard every word that Gerella was saying. Regina and Chong were scowling at Gerella at first, but when they heard what she said, they too knew that this was not the time to mourn the death of a dear friend.

Regina asked Chong in a worry whisper, “Where do we go next? Even Neptune has been a risky creature to contact.”

Chong muttered, “Klementine probably has another friend or something. Maybe we can seek refuge in the triplets’ lab.”

Regina was practically panicking by now when she whisper-yelled, “That place isn’t big enough! They made that clear! We can’t just leave half of our own behind.”

Saxum’s voice came out in a low murmur, “We won’t. Neptune has another place that’s kept off the radar. We’ll go there, and stay about a week.”

Gerella didn’t like the ambiguity of what came after, so she pressed, “And then what?”

Saxum reluctantly tore his eye away from Delancy and sighed in impatience before he declared in a flat tone, “The tentative Plan B is to hide in lycan territory, but we’ll have to reach out to Klementine for a few trustworthy associates before we decide on the exact location. If that doesn’t work, then Rudolpho has someone in wolf territory, so we have that option as well. Anymore questions?”

Out of the hundreds Gerella had ever since Toby planted the seed of doubt in her head, she decided to pick the top one. “Is this even right, Saxum? Should we be doing this?”

Saxum’s impatience turned into shock before it was replaced with anger. He slowly stood, and Gerella followed suit, as the leader growled, “Is it right to protect ourselves? What do you think, Ella?”

Gerella swallowed the lump in her throat and uttered, “Kosh is dead, Saxum.”

“The people he worked with are still alive, Ella! His daughter is alive! She’s ruling the empire with the same iron fist that she inherited from that bastard who killed my family! Do you want to end up like them?”

At that moment, Gerella didn’t know how to tell Saxum that he might be wrong without telling him about Toby. Then, doubt entered her mind – how was she so sure that Toby was telling the truth, that even if the vampire rulers didn’t want hybrids in their territory the lycan rulers would gladly take them in? He wasn’t even a member of the royal family. He mentioned the queen was his best friend but was there even a friendship strong enough for one to make a guarantee on the other’s behalf?

Gerella felt like a complete monster for pressing Saxum one more time but she just needed the answer to one last question for the time being. “Apart from them, did the administrators of the empire slaughter another hybrid or the couple who produced them?”

Saxum took a heavy breath to avoid losing his temper before he murmured, “Only another six infants that he came across when he was hunting me down, and I hope the numbers stay there. Go help the mothers and children pack, and send Neptune in on your way to their rooms.”

They packed up and left within the next hour, using scent sprays that matched the forest trees (custom-made by Klementine in cases of ‘emergencies’) to cover their tracks. No one dared mention anything based on suspicion yet but it was worrying the parents that their children seemed to be coughing a little too much for a normal child. Regina and Chong were worried about their own toddler too, and hoped that it was just the result of fatigue.

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The vigils and custodes only reached the beach and the abandoned hut two hours after the hybrids left. In the darkness around 11:30pm, it took them another thirty minutes to find the entry of the hideout under the wrecked car. In the hideout itself, they could smell that the scents matched those found in the hideout of the Forest of Oderem. The only difference was that no belongings were left behind this time.

They searched the forest before Duica had the idea to start looking through the wooden hut again. The fact that the floorboards had uneven gaps in between and the plank walls weren't evenly constructed depicted that this shelter was not built by a professional. Perhaps it was a family project of sorts.

If there weren't any clues here that would lead them to the hybrids, maybe there was something that could tell them who this shelter belonged to. To his disappointment, there didn't seem to be any scent. This place was abandoned for a very long time. He could smell the thick dust and the rooms with closed windows and doors only smelled musty, nothing more.

He and five others ran their hands over the layers of dust of the furniture and walls, hoping to find something hidden. When Bernadette decided that she wanted more ventilation, she took heavy footsteps to the slightly-opened window. She stepped on the floorboards so hard like she was punishing the hut for their dead end, and that was when one of the boards broke and her leg went right through the hole she created, alarming her colleagues who sprinted from all corners of the hut to her as she cursed at the pain.

Dominic and Duica had to break the board around her leg before carefully pulling her out as she tried not to make a big deal out of the wood splinters that went through her flesh. Dominic and Portia started helping her take those out while Duica took out the broken floorboard and ran his fingers through the cobwebs and dust that filled the space underneath. When his fingers felt something solid, he froze for a second and his heart raced before he took out the small, slender object.

After flicking away the dust, Duica found that it was a pen.

'That's it?' Duica thought to himself. He opened and closed the cap, finding nothing out of the ordinary. After opening the cap for the second time, his fingertips ran over every inch once more. He felt a certain unevenness near the tip of the fountain pen, so he went to the window to get a clearer view of the engraving using the moonlight.

"Are you even going to share, Duica? You wouldn't have found that without me, you know?" Bernadette protested as Portia and Dominic continued trying to get all the splinters out.

Duica turned to his friend and said, "Well, it's good to know that your arguing abilities remain unaffected by the splinters."

He threw her the pen, which she caught with ease. Bernadette started looking at it while remaining seated on the ground. When she felt the engraving with her hands, she asked Duica, "What does this circular thing mean in lycan territory? Is it a company logo or something?"

"That's a question for the lycans. We should check in with the others, and if there's nothing, we'll head back and report...and get you to a doctor, of course."

Half of the vigils stayed behind at the hut to wait for the synthetic scents from scent sprays to fade while the other half made their way back. The half who stayed discovered a few hours later that the scent sprays used weren't premium ones. It was nowhere near the 40-hour mark but they could tell the natural scents were becoming detectable with the fading of the fake ones left behind.

They began tracking for only five minutes before a heavy downpour ruined everything. It rained for two hours, and after it finally turned into a drizzle, both the natural and synthetic scents were no longer present. They explored the trail with the faint natural scent from earlier, but found nothing so they decided to return to the empire.

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Greg got back from decipio practice and went straight back to the Den. His followers were as tired and cranky as he was but they had to get this done tonight. The invoices Ruby Lyworth gave him led them nowhere because it was filled with company names that were unfamiliar to him, which made sense.

Only vampires would see the need in buying allicin, and Greg didn't keep tabs on proditors and their businesses because there was never a need to, and it would have been difficult to check up on their progress since proditors weren't in his turf.

Greg entered the first room, where J.J. and Bundy were each tied to a chair. After the duke lowered himself in a backwards-sitting position on a chair in front of the two, he began, "I'm tired. I'm pissed. I'm impatient. So let's make

this quick and we all go home happily. Delay me and someone will get hurt. Concise answers only – who’s promising you two scatterbrains and Red power after trying to overthrow me?”

Bundy’s neck stiffened. J.J. subconsciously shifted in her seat and pretended to be clearing her throat when she noticed how Alissa’s fiery eyes were pinned on her. The two besties agreed that, if they were ever caught, they’d just lie.

Since Alissa looked like she was choking J.J. with that glare, the rogue decided that she should say something to not look like she was hiding something. “We don’t know what you’re talking about, Your Grace. We have been minding our own business whe—”

Greg was so tired from practice and now he was further drained from this bullsh!t that he merely waved his fingers and leaned his head against the headrest of the chair for a quick shuteye as Alissa took over. Her hand circled J.J.’s neck, and she tightened her grip and choked the woman before her fingernails went through the rogue’s skin.

It was one thing to be desperate for air but another to be enduring the blades of long fingernails being slowly pressed into your skin. Sweat appeared on her forehead and drenched her armpits, bl00d was beginning to ooze from the incisions made by Alissa’s nails, and J.J.’s screaming was as annoying as it was piercing.

Greg gr0aned in irritation. Well, a fifteen-second rest was better than nothing. He watched the pathetic woman struggling in her chair as a dead faced, exhausted Alissa continued her work. When J.J. finally gave the asking-for-mercy look that Alissa was waiting for, her hand detached only slightly from her victim’s neck as she waited.

After J.J. took the breaths she needed and her skin healed the wounds Alissa inflicted, J.J. began by stuttering, “S-Some d-don’t say that t-they are o-overthrowing you, Your G-Grace. S-See...o-once you serve the k-kingdom, y-your right t-to govern rogues is f-forfeited.”

“Forfeited?” Greg asked in a low, shivering tone.

He got up from his chair and moved towards J.J. The way he towered over her made her feel like an insect squirming in fear. He held her chin and gave her cheekbones a painful squeeze as his onyx eyes bore into her fearful ones when he declared, "I make the rules in the rogue world. The mere question of my right is a conspiracy that I will not have. Who. Started. This."

"I don't know the ring leader, Your Grace, I swear. W-We were told t-that...if successful...we wouldn't have to work for another day in our lives."

It was almost hilarious how they considered pickpocketing 'work'. It was so simple that it might as well be considered a leisure activity. If Greg would ever meet a rogue child that he favored, this would be the first skill he'd teach the kid, who he was certain could beat these women by the end of a six-month intensive practice.

Greg moved on to Bundy, and Hailey came to position her hand right in front of Bundy's throat, a silent threat of strangulation before Greg asked, "What else has your friend not told me?"

Bundy didn't even need to think twice before blurting the facts like she was pouring out hot gossip, "We were paid. In cash. We used it for drinks...the hotel. And in exchange, we only had to speak less, stay in inns that we stayed in before and k-ke-keep an eye of your f-followers."

"Keep an eye on my followers," Greg repeated to digest the information before he prompted, "For what?"

"They didn't say. But from what we understood, Your Grace, you might not be the only one they want to kill."

What a laughable venture. These creatures actually thought they could kill Greg Claw and his followers. They must be underestimating the size and aptitude of his network. But the whole plan made sense. Watch his followers to know which ones to kill after trying to kill the leader. His followers were loyal to him, so killing only Greg himself was not enough to guarantee unconditional and sustainable loyalty to a new rogue ruler.

Greg scoffed and pressed the corner of his eyes for another quick shuteye when he murmured, "If I weren't so tired, I'd be laughing right now. Name of the creature who came to you?"

It couldn't be the triplets. They wouldn't risk being seen. Was it Klementine? Her assistant, Feva? Or was it Ruby Lyworth this whole time?

J.J. gulped and muttered, "El-Elvis and Sivle."

Alissa groaned. Another set of names. Another routine tracking. Another search. Something this simple used to be nothing to her but with the decipio practice and vampire-helping, this whole conspiracy issue was getting agitating with lack of sleep.

Greg questioned J.J., "Was that the truth or the lie?"

"Truth," she answered immediately.

Greg's homicidal eyes bore into both of theirs for another few more moments before he asked, "Have you both heard from the Callows?"

Bundy mouthed the word 'Callow' like it was something foreign, and she locked perplexed eyes with her friend who was equally confused before J.J. whispered from where she sat like Greg and the others couldn't hear them, "Is it Gallow? As in, Ben Gallow?"

Alissa heaved an angry sigh before exclaiming in a way that made the two hostages jump, "IT'S CALLOW, YOU IDIOTS! MATTHEW, NESSA AND OURELIA CALLOW!"

J.J. looked at Alissa in further confusion for another two seconds before realization dawned on her, and she questioned, "Didn't they explode with their lab more than 25 years ago?"

Bundy added in a gossipy whisper, "Aren't they dead? We heard you and your friends made sure they were dead."

There were no traces of humor in their eyes. There was only curiosity and a zest for the truth, or at the very least, something worthy to gossip about.

Greg knew that he couldn't get anything else from them, so he got up and said, "I'm going to ask Little Red the same thing about the Elvis and Sivle thing. If he says something different, you both won't live through the night."

Dormant Little Red registered the bloodstains on Alissa's fingernails the moment she stepped foot into the room, and Greg didn't even finish his

question before the little man spat everything he knew. He was paid. In cash. But he had to sober up to be aware of who was watching him because he was told that those were Greg's followers, who were going to be eliminated as soon as their leader was eliminated.

When asked about the Callows, Red seemed as deaf to the name as if he was drunk, having no recollection of the triplets until he heard the three names and vaguely remembered a destroyed lab. Other than that, he too was clueless.

Greg was satisfied with the smooth heart-to-heart session. He got up from his chair, patted Little Red on his head and thanked him before leaving the room. The top four left with him, and Desmond turned off the lights and shut the door, leaving the sober lycan in the darkness.

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At 4:15 a.m. Lucianne dashed to the front door when she heard a light tap. She and Xandar asked Mrs Parker to babysit much earlier this morning so that they both could spend a few hours together.

Lucianne got the picnic basket while she heated up some of the food that she and Xandar prepared the night before. After Xandar stuffed the picnic blanket into the basket, they left through the backdoor, shifted and made their way to the freesia field.

Xandar still carried her across the river, and when they reached their destination, they made their way across the field of flowers and placed the basket under the largest acacia tree, their usual spot. After shifting back, they set up the food and drinks.

When Lucianne was satisfied with the arrangement of everything on the picnic blanket, she was about to lower herself next to Xandar before his hands went to the sides of her bum to pull her to sit in his lap, making her gasp.

Her eyes snapped to his, and he was gazing at her with the most blissful smile. As his arms tightened around her shoulders and abdomen, his lips trapped hers in a slow, loving kiss. Her cute moan came out in a way that made his heart swell and made his animal coo. He could never get tired of hearing that sound, and he loved the fact that it was because of his efforts.

What made the experience of kissing the most beautiful creature in the kingdom more amazing was that, ever since they marked each other, he could feel her while he was kissing her. He could feel how she let herself forget everything and be completely vulnerable with him when he touched her; how she was pouring her love into his being through her lips and touch; and how at peace she felt just by letting their lips collide until she was out of breath.

When Lucianne had to break away for air, Xandar moved to her jawline, neck and shoulders. He was thankful that she chose to wear a strapless tank top and short skirt that gave him full access to her neck, shoulders and thighs. Her fingers pulled at his hair each time he sucked on her skin and squeezed her thigh.

A stream of sexy moans followed as Xandar's hand at her inner thigh felt the heat radiating in the small space, and this made him emit a dangerous yet alluring growl before his hand went up to her butt to give it a rough squeeze. She gasped and whispered his name, and when Xandar's mouth gave her mark extra attention while his fingers found their way to her wet folds, her legs parted slightly to offer him more room to continue his work there as she moaned in ecstasy.

Xandar's fingers gained speed when she was close, and her fingernails dug into his skin when she came with a scream. As she took rapid breaths, her indecent beast carefully pulled out his hand and licked the nectar that he collected from the morning's harvest. His eyes closed as he and his animal savored in the taste, the most delicious thing to ever touch their taste buds.

Lucianne's hand touched the hardened part of him in his shorts. Their eyes met, and the temptation to give into each other's desires right then and there was evident. But they both remembered that, once upon a time, someone was watching them when they thought they were alone in the field.

Their eyes roamed the surroundings out of defensive instinct, and when they saw, heard and smelled nothing, Lucianne's hand snuck into his pants to bring his erection into full view. Xandar growled and speedily placed her on the grass as he pushed down his pants and boxers before helping Lucianne remove her underwear.

He entered her at one-go and began pumping, pulling down her top to reveal her ample breasts moving to the rhythm of his tool's entry and exit. His rough

hands touched the softness of her breasts as his fingers and thumb played with the swollen nipples.

“Mm...faster, Xandar.”

The Lycan King smirked and sped up as they moaned in pleasure. Xandar knew that he wasn't going to last much longer, and went all out to make sure Lucianne got there first. When Lucianne screamed and locked him in, he too came with a satisfied smile as he laid on her beautiful body.

The moment they caught their breaths, their animals pushed forward and did two rounds of their own before allowing their human parts to regain control.

Xandar adjusted Lucianne's top after pecking kisses on her boobs, and slid her underwear through her legs just to have an excuse to kiss her thighs and butt. She helped him with his boxers and shorts after giving his tool one last loving stroke.

He leaned back against the acacia tree and guided her to his chest. With an euphoric smile, her free hand that rested on his shoulder moved to his abdomen before sliding up his well-defined muscles, and his animal lay on its back as it too savored her touch. Her palm stopped over his beating heart, and her thumb stroked the area affectionately.

He gazed at her as she smiled dreamily at his chest, where his heart was. With his hand over hers, he pecked a kiss on her forehead and declared, “It's yours, Lucy. Every part of me is yours.”

Lucianne's eyes glistened and she went completely speechless, confident that her voice would break if she managed to speak at all. She smashed her lips against his, pulling him close for a deep kiss, which Xandar was more than happy to reciprocate.

When Lucianne freed him, she whispered, “I love you...so much.”

With his forehead against hers, he whispered back, “I love you too, baby, so much.”

They stared into each other's eyes for another few more moments before Xandar's growling stomach decided that it was time to eat. Despite being already married to her, his animal still felt embarrassed at that barbaric sound that ruined the romantic atmosphere.

Lucianne actually found it funny, and she chuckled before reaching for the blueberry muffins. She carefully tore off bite-sized bits and fed her indecent beast who had no intention of freeing her from his embrace anytime soon. He tried to suck her finger with every feeding, and his animal let out a pleading whimper everytime his human missed, which in turn made Lucianne's lycan prompt its human to peck a kiss on Xandar's jaw to calm her mate.

After the muffins were done, Xandar started feeding her croissant sandwiches, carefully tearing enough so that a bite would have a bit of everything but not too big that Lucianne would struggle to have it fit into her mouth. When the fruits, mini tarts and pudding were done and they felt stuffed, Xandar put tea bags into two mugs before Lucianne opened the flask and poured hot water into them. They let the drink sit while they started talking.

Lucianne started, "How's the practice with Pelly and Greg? She's not going easy on you, is she?"

Xandar scoffed before he replied, "With the things she's making me see, I sometimes wonder if she resents me for not getting her the doll I promised her as Reagan."

Lucianne giggled at his response and stroked his shoulder before she asked, "What did she make you see?"

His smile faltered slightly when his fingers ran down her soft hair, and he explained, "In the beginning, nothing terrifyingly overwhelming. It was normally the rogues, you being in danger, or our friends and allies either slaughtered or taken hostage."

Lucianne's spine straightened in attention. If those were not 'terrifyingly overwhelming', what was?

It was as if Xandar could see the confusion that arched her eyebrows, the curiosity and worry that swam in those gorgeous black-and-lilac orbs. He pecked a kiss on the back of her hand before he answered her silent question, "In the uh...latest practice session, we started with the slithering-manipulation. I was made to think that..." he swallowed a lump in his throat before proceeding to hold onto her hand tighter and say, "...that my parents' plan to make me mate and mark Kylton succeeded, and I saw you..." he cleared his throat before he choked out, "...marked...by Greg."

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Whatever Xandar just said was not just ‘terrifyingly overwhelming’. It was monstrously torturous, heartbreaking and soul-crushing. It was basically the strongest cocktail of all his fears combined into a single scene.

Lucianne’s hands reached out to stroke his cheek and shoulder, ensuring him that she was right there in front of him, that she was his and only his, that they weren’t apart and never will be so. He leaned into her hand and kissed her palm before she asked in a small, encouraging voice, “How did you fight it?”

He managed a smile when he explained, “For a while, I didn’t think I could. My instinct was to pounce on Greg, who was holding you a little too close for my comfort...actually, I prefer if he didn’t hold or touch you at all.”

His grip around her instinctively tightened further, and Lucianne made no move to loosen it, leaning closer into him, letting the sparks travel through his being as she waited for him to continue. “I think what made that so convincing was the fact that I did smell Greg, but when I didn’t smell you, my animal started to suspect something was up.”

He let out a short, dark scoff when he explained, “The setting was a royal ball, and you should have seen the shock and anger on Greg’s face when I pulled you right out of his arms and onto the dance floor. When I held your hand and waist, you felt...light, too light for any living being, and your skin felt like the cold night air – lifeless. It was odd.”

“With hindsight, I should have just focused on the lack of your warmth and the absence of your scent but whatever I was seeing just dominated my mind.” A pause, and he uttered, “You...didn’t approve of the way I ‘stole’ you from my cousin, but you just went with the flow to avoid starting a scene. I asked you why you chose him over me, and the fact that you ‘reminded’ me our Goddess chose him for you made the manipulation practice turn into a horrific nightmare. I then asked if you...had a say in the Moon Goddess’s choice, would you have chosen me over him. You said ‘no’ without needing to think, and you started looking...disgusted and uncomfortable.”

Xandar’s heart squeezed at the thought of his little freesia feeling disgusted with him, and his strength was drained when he recalled how she distanced herself from him, like he would break her heart if she ever gave it to him, like

he wasn't good enough to take care of her, like he could never be the one to make her happy.

Lucianne started pecking kisses on his chin, jaw and cheek, reminding him about what was real. He took a deep breath from her hair before he continued, "When Greg came over, wanting to take you out of my hands, I lost it. I issued the mate challenge, and used the Authority to compel him to accept. In the midst of all the creatures around us, including you, telling me that I couldn't issue such a challenge when I myself was married to...another, my vision cleared and the manipulation effects wore off, no doubt with the help of the Authority. It was like...when I refused to believe that that was my fate, our fate...the Authority pushed away the lies and nonsense."

Lucianne started wondering why she didn't feel any of this during practice. Then, she realized that she actually did, and she got out using her Authority too. She recalled that Rafael was manipulating her with her relationship with Xandar the previous night too, warning her beforehand this time.

The two vampire best friends must have timed their practice to synchronize hers and Xandar's heartbreak to make it convincing. She didn't blame them for using this method because it was a given that proditors would stoop to any level to win. So it was better to practice and be ready now than to be taken by surprise later.

In her own practice, before Lucianne herself came to realize that the person in the manipulation wasn't really Xandar, her heart squeezed until it was hard to breathe as well. After she came out of the manipulation, she still felt residual anguish, which her dazed self thought was her own pain when it was actually her mate's.

It was also no wonder Xandar felt so relieved when they held each other in a long embrace during their break after that round. It wasn't just her who was seeing these nightmares now, it was him too.

After Xandar pressed a kiss on her forehead, he finished the tale with a merciless complaint, "It's unfair that all Greg saw was his mother being snatched away from his side by a strange-looking lycan when what I saw was my mate being taken away from me."

Lucianne carefully uttered, "His mother must have meant a lot to him too. The fear and pain would've been an equal challenge to cope with," she pecked an assuring kiss at the corner of his lips before asking softly, "Did Pelly at least warn you that she was going to do something like that?"

"Yes. Three times, in fact. But I still didn't see it coming. Probably because it was my first time, so it still hurt. And do you know what the most infuriating thing about that whole session was, sweetheart? When my eyes cleared, that little vampire girl-turned-empress was actually sitting on the grass, looking at me with those green, sparkling eyes and wide smile like she was watching a movie. Instead of giving me pointers of improvement, the first thing she said after that whole nightmare she just gave me was romantic. Last I checked, we were supposed to be practicing for battle. I didn't sign up to be an actor in her movie. Was she even supposed to sit down there like that? What if I lost my temper and started randomly throwing and kicking things in the manipulation, including her?!"

Lucianne tried not to chuckle at how Xandar described Pellethia as 'little', and when he complained about being in a movie that he didn't sign up for, she had to try very hard to press back a broadening smile.

After a sweet peck on his lips, she looked into his eyes and said, "Well, My King, you'd make a very good-looking actor."

His mood improved with that compliment, and he gazed coquettishly into his favorite pair of eyes and noted the beautiful blushes before he asked in a deep voice, "So does that mean you would've let me drag you onto the dance floor?"

She traced his eyebrows as her cheeks continued heating up when she said in a small voice, "I think so. I've always accepted and refused dance requests based on the vibes I get from each person, and I've never gotten any bad vibes from you. To me, you've always exuded confidence and assurance."

"Well then," he pulled her impossibly closer and muttered, "Guess I shouldn't have done away with royal balls after my parents' passing. Maybe a formal dance on the first day of the annual collaboration would've kept Cummings's hands off you and bound us to each other a little sooner."

Lucianne chuckled at his line of reasoning before teasing, "Yes, an annual ball would've been a good idea. Imagine the number of beautiful women you'd get

to dance with year after year before we meet. I wonder how many times you'd have to spin Sasha Cummings around."

"Well, if I spin her once straight into a fireplace, I doubt there'll be a second."

Lucianne laughed at the image he painted, and the melody calmed any storm left in him. With his forehead on hers, he muttered in a firm tone, "Without my parents' nagging at me about the duty to mingle, I doubt I'd dance with any woman. None of them were my type, and there was almost no common ground beyond our privileged status that it was hard to hold a conversation with them about anything other than their businesses and inheritance."

He inched closer to feel the warmth on her cheeks with his lips, making her heat up even more before he whispered into her ear, "You coming into my life just made me understand why I was never drawn to anyone else. I was waiting for you, my little freesia."

Although Lucianne was deeply touched by what he just said, she continued teasing in a whisper, "I have to admit, it feels nice to be complimented by a good-looking actor, My King."

Xandar pecked a kiss on her nose and said, "If I ever go into that line of work, My Queen, I'm dragging you there with me. And there is no way Greg will be on the same set."

She felt the flash of insecurity come and leave his being. Her thumb traced his lower lip before she looked deeply into his eyes and said, "Whatever happens, wherever we are, know that I'm in love with you. Only you, okay?"

Xandar's eyes glistened in joy and gratitude, feeling the strength of her love in those words, the depth of her devotion through their bond. After pressing a slow, deep kiss on her lips, he murmured into the small space between their parted lips, "Thank you, baby. Know that I'm only in love with you, too."

He waited for the usual answer, and Lucianne responded, "I know. Thank you, my love."

They stayed and watched the sunrise, looking at the dewdrops as the flowers slowly bloomed. When it was time to leave, they decided to just take a slow walk back. Hand-in-hand, they strolled across the freesia field, walked through the forest and crossed the river before coming back to the forest behind their backyard.

They reached home just in time for Lucianne to get ready to go see Margaret, who came up to her the night before and asked if the queen had time to spare because Margaret wanted to talk to someone who could relate to rejections and had lived through the effects of it.

Mrs Parker went home, and Xandar took over looking after Reida. When Lucianne was dressed and came to check to see if Xandar needed anything else before she left, Reida pooped. However, the moment Lucianne rushed to the cupboard to get a fresh set of baby clothes, Xandar snatched it from her hands and insisted that he could do it, asking her to leave so she wouldn't be late.

After pecking a kiss on his cheek and on her daughter's forehead, she drove to the station to get Margaret.

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0 7 minutes read

One of the perks about being the queen was that Lucianne could be fully trusted to take suspects and criminals out for however long she wanted. It wasn't advisable or customary because of issues of safety, but Margaret's case was, of course, different since she was working to get pardoned. There was no way she'd try and hurt Lucianne, and even if she did, Lucianne's Authority would stop her.

After they got into the car and began talking about Stella, Lucianne insisted Margaret call her 'Lucy' like everybody else before their conversation continued. Lucianne drove them to an outdoor café with potted plants here and there and a water feature for a wall that had the most invigorating sound. After placing their order for slices of cake and cups of coffee, they thanked the waitress and got down to business.

Margaret was pressing her fingers at intervals when she started with her rehearsed question, "Lucy, after the rejections, how did you sort of...paper over the pain?"

Lucianne immediately said, "I didn't paper over the pain, Margaret, and I highly recommend against trying to do that. It doesn't work. The pain still lingers and grows, staying longer than it's welcomed to. And the debilitating effects of it shows. Not everyone will see it, but we definitely see it when we're by ourselves."

“So, what then? You just let the pain show?”

With a small nod, Lucianne replied, “Yes. I’m most comfortable letting it show when I’m alone. The thing with pain is that we have to feel it to get through it. Let the pain come. Let it flow through your entire being. Cry. Scream if you have to. Being strong doesn’t take away one’s right to be vulnerable, not even yours. I’m not saying that you should cry in front of your pup but you are allowed to cry, Margaret. You’re allowed to be you, to express yourself in a way that feels right for you.”

Margaret wiped away her tears, and she had to admit that every drop was liberating. Seeing that they were in public with many creatures glancing at them...well, mostly at Lucianne, Margaret pulled herself together and saved the tears for later to avoid causing a scene.

She then asked a question that seemed more like a question that she should be asking herself and not someone else, “Why do I do this? Well, I mean, I know I’ve buried the pain deep down because of the need to survive as a rogue and all but...I feel like since I came here, since I...met Tate, I felt like I’m trying to move past the pain...but everytime I do, everytime I think I’m moving forward...I’m just slapped with the truth that the betrayal, loss and regret is still very much alive within me. I...” she sighed, “I don’t even know what I’m asking, Lucy. Goddess, I’m so sorry.”

Lucianne reached for her hands and gave them a gentle, encouraging squeeze, making her rosewood eyes lock with her assuring orbs when Lucianne uttered, “Don’t be sorry, Margaret. You are moving forward. You are progressing. You wouldn’t have awakened your psychic abilities had you not chosen to make peace with your past. The process is just...slow. It takes time, but you are getting there. We can see it. Stella and Tate can see it.”

Margaret asked in a dismay whisper, “Then why does it feel like I’m stuck? Why do I keep reverting to this loop of pain when I know it isn’t good for me, when I know I don’t deserve to feel this? Is it because my heart wants to feel this?”

“No, Margaret. It’s not what your heart wants. It’s just what your heart is...used to feeling. It takes...a reasonable degree of awareness and discipline to fight through it, to refuse to believe that you’re trapped in that loop

forever and to choose to believe that you deserve all the gifts that life can offer you, the gifts that you can offer yourself.”

“The gifts that I can offer myself?”

“Yeah, you know, things like self-respect, self-love, taking chances. Essentially, things that make you love yourself more than you already do, things that make you happy.”

Self-respect was something Margaret understood. It was how she rose through the ranks anyway. Taking chances was not unfamiliar, seeing that rogues have to move around, never staying too long at one place, taking a chance that a new venue with no known wolf-patrolling was safe.

Self-love was a little bit more foreign for Margaret. As for the things that made her happy...it was a lot of things before she became a rogue, when life was much simpler.

“Lucy, after the rejections, how did you find happiness again? Family and friends’ support aside, how did you find it again?”

Lucianne contemplated on how she was going to phrase her response before she said, “Well, this may sound...self-entitled but um...I told myself that I deserve to be happy.”

“Because you have the love of the king?” Margaret asked in curiosity.

Lucianne shook her head slightly when she replied, “No, not exactly. I actually started telling myself that long before I met Xandar. On my worst days, to calm the storm in me, I tried as hard as I could to convince myself that I deserve to be happy because I’m...not a bad person, and I’m taking action to be better everyday. I know I’m no saint, and I admit that I pissed off and killed many creatures over the years, but I would never hurt someone for the sake of it. Xandar does make me happy, and his love is something that...I didn’t think I would be lucky enough to get, but before him, I found happiness in the little things in my life – training, memories made with friends and family, a quiet run, a cool breeze, a good book, betting against dad...”

Lucianne laughed just thinking about it, and added, “To be loved by a creature who you love just as much is...wonderful, but, as individuals, we are still something without it and we still deserve happiness as long as we wake up everyday and just...keep going.”

The coffee and cakes arrived. Margaret took a sip and processed everything she just heard before she asked, "How do you tell yourself that you deserve to be happy? I've just tried saying it in my mind right now and I already feel guilty doing it. It's as if I...don't believe I deserve that. I mean, I've done a lot of wrong things before I ran into you and Tate."

"You did what you had to do, Margaret. I'm not saying that the things you did were right, but I do acknowledge that you did what you knew to be the best way forward for you and your pup, and later on, for your pack. What's important right now is that you...refuse to go back to how you were. As for the guilt...it might have stemmed from the stereotypical image you have of a...deserving happy person. See, most of us are programmed to believe that wanting to claim happiness is wishful thinking instead of an achievable goal. Our subconscious is trained to think that only the purest creatures deserve happiness but...personally, I really do think that...unless one finds pleasure in harming others or is harming someone to fulfil their own selfish desires, no one deserves to be unhappy."

Margaret took a bite from her cake as she gave that some thought, and couldn't help but find it...logical, rational and fair. She definitely had no plans to return to rogue life, especially now that they were earning a chance at safety, and Stella looked a lot healthier and happier ever since they came to lycan territory and didn't have to run around anymore.

Margaret then asked, "When you mentioned that...we are still something even without the love of a mate, that we still deserve happiness...does it mean that it's...wrong to find happiness in someone else? For the past thirteen years, I've only found happiness, pure and lasting happiness, in Stella."

"And that isn't wrong, Margaret. It isn't wrong at all. It's natural for a mother to find happiness in her pup. But in the midst of finding your happiness in your daughter, it's also healthy to find happiness in yourself."

"Isn't my daughter...part of myself, in a way?"

"Stella is a unique masterpiece that you created and raised. She holds a large part of your heart but she's her own person. You are your own person too, Margaret. While loving Stella and finding happiness from her existence, it's also...good to find happiness with your own existence. Be happy with what you gave life to but also be happy with what you can continue giving life to, and I'm not just talking about children. You can give life in so many ways, be it researching the best spots to find food to feed a pack, or merely showing up

to add your dash of magic in the lives of those who matter to you. Your worth doesn't deteriorate or end after Stella was conceived. Your individuality as a fellow pack member, a loyal friend, a trusted ally are still there. Stella just added an extra category that you're proud to carry with you."

"I like that," Margaret murmured with a smile. She leaned back and said, "I love my daughter, and I'm proud to be able to call myself her mother but it's also great to know that...I'm also someone of value in the other aspects of my life. It's like I...appreciate what and who I've grown to be."

"Exactly," Lucianne was happy to see that Margaret was opening up, her smile increasing in hope and radiance.

When her brows furrowed, Margaret got to her next question, "Are you always...happy with who you are?"

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0 6 minutes read

Lucianne chuckled and shook her head without hesitation as she answered, "No. I can think of more than a hundred things wrong with myself and I'd love to tell you all about it but we'd probably be here for days!"

Margaret was encouraged to laugh in response because she felt less alone. "Don't take this the wrong way but I'm glad you said that, Lucy. It's never going to be easy to be happy with who we are, is it?"

"It's never going to be easy to be unhappy with who we are either, don't you think?" Lucianne turned the question around with a smile.

That got Margaret thinking, and when she realized what Lucianne was trying to tell her, she smiled wider and said, "I'm starting to think that Tate lied to me when he said you were only a Gamma. Either that, or you have a hidden job that you told no one about. The way your brain works far surpasses any pack warrior...it surpasses most people I know and met, actually, even pack leaders."

Lucianne flicked her hand like it wasn't a big deal when she said, "It's just from hours of reading, Margaret. I'm just lucky to be able to afford so many books...and to have a family who spoils me with so many books...and now a husband who's spoiling me with more books. Anyway, the point is that as difficult as it is to be happy with who we are, it's also difficult to be unhappy

with who we are. You and I both know how self-blame and self-hate can be draining – mentally, emotionally and psychologically. We should be accountable for our actions, but we shouldn't have to punish ourselves forever for our faults and flaws. If we don't like something, we can always find ways to improve rather than complain and hate on ourselves all day long. If it's difficult either way, I'd rather be happily working on myself than unhappily sulking and ranting for the rest of my life."

Margaret confessed, "I guess I never thought of it that way. Self-love isn't something I'm very familiar with. Growing up, it was even portrayed to be selfish sometimes."

"It isn't though. Many of us are taught that, but it really isn't. Loving ourselves is as essential as it is to breathe," Lucianne took a sip from her mug and reminisced about her past when she admitted, "Self-love is...work. Like with any kind of love, it's a constant practice of kindness, patience, tolerance, forgiveness and the desire to do better by ourselves, for ourselves. It'll always be a work-in-progress, especially if we make a mistake. If we can find it within ourselves to forgive the people we love, we sure as hell should be more than okay to forgive ourselves."

Margaret took a few more sips as she digested that information, and uttered, "What I like about whatever you've just said is that we...can be happy on our own. I love the power in that. It emanates control and we hold the remote. It just shows that we're not...reliant on someone else's love or happiness to actually...be happy."

Lucianne explained, "If we rely on something outside to make us happy, it's neither stable nor reliable because once that thing disappears, our happiness goes with it. It's better to choose to be happy with what you are or what you strive to be. It's more sustainable, and frankly, more doable."

Margaret decided to go deeper. "I hope you don't mind me asking this but...when you're alone, do you sometimes feel...empty?"

"I used to."

"What did you do when you felt that way? How do you fill up the emptiness, the cold barren wasteland that you gave no permission to build up?"

Lucianne replayed what she did and responded, "I fill it up with the things I love and appreciate. I'm quite sure we both can always love and appreciate our strength, our independence, our ability to get things done, all those things that we're internally proud of. The beautiful thing about this process is that, once we recall what we're made of, it gives us a sense of fulfillment, even happiness."

Margaret crossed her legs and leaned back when she said, "I feel like a bada.ss when I think of those things."

"You should, because you are," Lucianne encouraged her with a broad smile.

Margaret chuckled, and then Tate came to her mind. The times they almost k!ssed but didn't because she pulled away. "When you met the king...how did you know what you both had was...going to last? I haven't told anyone this but...as right as Tate feels now, there's a part for me that just wonders whether this would abruptly end."

This was the first time Lucianne admitted, "I felt exactly the same way with Xandar when we met. With his status and the fact that he's a lycan made me certain that the mate-bond wasn't going to last. Even when we gave our bond a chance...in the beginning, I was just waiting for him to get tired of me and eventually come to terms that rejecting each other was the way to go. But instead of drifting apart, we just got closer. Everything he said and did just...pulled me closer every day. Even after I fell for him, I was still scared to commit fully that I kept him at a distance for a while. With hindsight, distancing him was ridiculous. But at that time, I was just being careful. I was just scared, scared of having to go through another heartbreak that I didn't ask for."

Margaret resonated incredibly well with that. It wasn't that she didn't want to be with Tate. She was just scared. She just wanted to be careful.

Lucianne then continued, "But my brother and friends made me realize that...Xandar could be different, and I shouldn't just use my past to justify running away from something that could very well be...it."

Margaret started pressing her fingers at intervals again when she admitted, "Tate does make me feel special...seen. He does seem like a good person, and I love that he has already bonded so well with Stella."

"Does he bond well with you though?" Lucianne asked, the cup in her hand stopped in mid-air as she waited for her answer with large, curious orbs.

Margaret nodded like it was obvious and she answered, "Of course."

Lucianne sighed in relief and said, "Tate is my friend and I'd love for him to get the woman he's fallen for but not if the woman doesn't want it, so I had to ask. It's great to hear that you want this because...you personally do, and not just because it's what Stella wants."

A blissful smile curled Margaret's lips when she said, "When I speak to him, I forget to keep a straight face. I feel comfortable saying whatever I want around him, and he's been incredibly patient with me. I even feel bad for the way I treated him before the offer for conditional pardon was granted, but it doesn't seem like he's holding a grudge. I can't remember anyone else who was that patient with me. After that rough start, he still looks at me like I'm some precious treasure."

"You are a precious treasure, Margaret. He's hoping that you can be HIS precious treasure some day."

Margaret chuckled lightly as faint blushes crept up her cheeks at that thought. She never thought she would be gifted a second-chance mate, and she sure as hell didn't think that he could be as perfect as Tate was to her, especially when he was an Alpha.

Lucianne noticed the way Margaret lit up and the manner her features softened just by talking about Tate, and it took a lot of restraint to not lift up her phone and snap a photo to send it to her Alpha friend who could very well use it as a screen wallpaper.

When Margaret came out of her thoughts, she said, "Looks like it's time to take a leap of faith then." When she finished her coffee, she confessed, "I wonder what I'll do after this whole vampire thing is resolved. The easy thing about being a rogue was that the day-to-day planning required little creativity. Basically, find supplies or run. I'm sure I'll be helping Tate but I wonder if there's anything beyond that."

"Something to do with plants maybe?" Lucianne suggested.

"Yes, but what? I don't want it to just be something aesthetic. I want it to be something that helps creatures find peace, to feel like they're heard and supported, like a safe place for people to open up."

"Like a therapist?"

“I wished I had the qualifications to be that...hm, maybe I will pursue that field once all this is over. But how can I help with what I have now, I wonder.”

“Huh,” Lucianne muttered when she recognized that energy, the enthusiasm for positive change.

“What?”

“You remind me of someone. You two have quite a bit in common. We should go meet her. C’mon.” Lucianne suggested and immediately got up from her seat.

Margaret got up as well when she asked in confusion, “Her?”

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0 8 minutes read

After Lucianne settled the bill, she drove them to Annie and Christian’s home. The guards let her in and told her that the duchess was at the other end of the villa with her guests.

“Perfect. Thank you, Frederick,” Lucianne uttered with a smile, and the guard tipped his cap in response.

Lucianne drove across the estate and parked right in front of a single-storey building that was detached from the villa. Lucianne got off and Margaret followed her. When Lucianne’s hand was inches away from the doorknob, her ears perked up.

She left the door alone and began walking around the building when she said, “They’re over here, actually.”

The moment they reached the back, Margaret gasped at the gorgeous greenhouse. It was the largest structure she had ever seen, and she had seen a lot of greenhouses back in her childhood days in Fleet Wood.

The moment they stepped inside the glass structure, Margaret’s rosewood eyes were immediately glued to the lush, green moss covering the entire left wall. The flowerbeds that lined the right wall were filled with small flowers of red, orange and yellow. Above those hung an entire row of potted ferns of various kinds. Purple and yellow morning glories climbed the wooden pillars. This place was nothing short of a paradise for the red wolf.

What Margaret loved about it most was that part of the ground was covered with soil and not just cement, and she could tell that the plant arrangement partitioned the space in a very subtle way. There was a corner with two pots of roses; another corner with jasmine; another with cacti; and the last with a small lime plant, which was where the duchess and her three guests were at that moment.

“Lucy!” Annie called out when she saw the queen, and dashed over, wrapping her in a warm hug.

“Thank you for letting me come on such short notice, Annie.”

“My Queen, what are you talking about?” Christian walked through the entrance, carrying one child in each of his arms as he continued, “You know you can drop in anytime, even without notice.”

“Oh, they’re up!” Annie exclaimed with a grin, taking Ianne from Christian as he handed Lewis to Lucianne when his son started tilting his body towards her so much that he was close to falling off.

“Hello, Lewis. You didn’t poop on your daddy again, did you?” Lucianne asked in a hushed tone that made the little boy chuckle in the most adorable way.

Margaret scoffed in amusement at what Lucianne said, and the duke uttered, “It really happened. It’s not a joke. He hates me.”

Annie retorted, “Christian, that’s not true. Infants defecate whenever they please. Ianne did the same thing to you last week and you’re not complaining about it.”

The duke argued softly and meekly, “She didn’t look like she did it on purpose.”

Annie rolled her eyes, and everyone there knew that the little girl that resembled Annie already had her father wrapped around her little finger. Lewis got his father’s eyes, nose and mouth, but his hair color was leaning towards Annie’s.

Margaret admired the twins and mentioned in passing, “They are just adorable.”

“Thank you.” Annie uttered, and the couple shot Lucianne a grateful smile.

The duke circled his arm around the duchess's waist and pecked a sweet kiss on her cheek before he said, "You know, it would have been nice for you to tell me that you knew the queen was coming. I felt left out, and my cousin was gloating through our link about him knowing what you ladies are up to before I do for once. I'm lucky that my favorite niece wet her diaper or he'd be boasting for more than two minutes."

Annie argued, "You said you were going through some files while the twins slept, so I sent you a text about Lucy coming to avoid disturbing your work."

He gazed at her in affectionate disbelief when he whispered, "How many times do I have to tell you that your links will never be bothersome no matter what I'm doing, My Duchess?"

"Well, this is only the thirty-second time since our marriage so we can still work our way up," Annie replied, despite her increasingly flushing cheeks.

Lucianne whispered in Margaret's way, "Aren't they just the cutest thing you've ever seen?"

Margaret couldn't deny that the duke and duchess looked beautiful together, much like Lucianne and Xandar. Their relationships exuded not just love and affection, but amplified deep assurance and wonderful communication. She wanted that.

Christian then spoke to Margaret with a warm smile, "It's great to see you getting close to having something like this too, Luna."

Margaret flinched at the title, which was when Lucianne said, "Oh, that. Yeah, Christian has an obsessiveness in calling us by our titles, save in very exceptional circumstances. I mean, he even calls his wife by her title."

Christian pressed back a guilty smile as the duchess chuckled. Margaret found it amusing as well but she managed to respond to Christian's earlier remark, "Well, I've been in a good, supportive circle that exemplifies what a relationship should look like, Your Grace. And may I just say that you both have the most gorgeous greenhouse I've ever seen."

Christian replied, "Oh, this greenhouse is Annie's masterpiece. It was a plain piece of nothing here, and my duchess worked her magic. Fun fact, she didn't let me pay for anything here."

Annie protested, "That's not true! You got those stools!"

"Ah, yes," Christian returned his sights to Margaret and spoke like he was resting his case, "I made a very significant contribution to the building of this greenhouse by purchasing those twenty mushroom-looking stools you see at the corner over there."

Lucianne chuckled when Annie elbowed her husband before Annie explained, "He already paid for most of the plants I wanted around this estate and even in the house, never letting me take out a dime and would pay me back if he found out I bought a plant in secret, even if it was just a small cactus. This greenhouse was something that I wanted to create and pay for on my own."

Margaret uttered, "I get that. It's not that you don't want his money or help, but you want something that you can call yours."

Annie smiled broader before looking at her husband and said, "See, she gets it."

Christian sighed in mock frustration before he said, "Luna, you're not supposed to side with someone you just met. It's dangerous. You don't know what she has up her sleeves."

Margaret was getting more comfortable with the hospitable atmosphere. "I've seen danger, Your Grace. Your duchess is nowhere near that trait or even in that spectrum."

Annie threw Christian a triumphant smile, and he took the opportunity to peck a kiss on her lips, making her cheeky features soften in tenderness. After clearing her throat, Annie decided to start introducing her guests.

"Margaret, these are Wanessa, Xelda and Yelena, my fellow co-founders. We had just finished discussing our future projects when Lucy linked me."

"Oh, pleasure to meet you," Margaret shook each of the ladies' hands before she asked Annie, "Cofounders of what?"

“A non-profit organization called L’Auditeur. It’s aimed to help those who’ve been emotionally and psychologically scarred by something that happened in the past. We just started a few months ago but the response has been quite overwhelming so we’re looking at plans for recruitment. We use this greenhouse for most sessions for now because it’s soothing enough to feel welcoming, but we’re thinking of getting a bigger place due to the increasing demand.”

Margaret’s eyes sparkled as Annie went on, “Wanessa and Xelda are certified therapists, and Yelena works and volunteers in programs involving abused women and children in human territory. None of us have a perfect past, and we wished we had something like this, someone who could understand and relate to what we were going through, so we started this initiative to be just that for creatures who may need this form of support but might not be able to afford it.”

“That’s...” Margaret was so awestruck that she was groping for the right word, and finally managed to not embarrass herself and say, “...amazing! Wow! Can I join?”

“About that,” Annie shot the smiling Lucianne a knowing look, inadvertently making her husband feel left out again before the duchess continued, “When Lucy told me that you were coming, the four of us here were hoping that you could help us expand our work to werewolf territory.”

“Me?” Margaret asked in shock.

“Yes, but you don’t have to start right away, of course. We all need time to heal ourselves first. You, like everybody else, are more than welcome to join the activities and healing sessions but we were hoping that, one day, you’ll take a chance to help lead this initiative with us, if you want to, that is. This isn’t an obligation or...”

“I’d love to!” Margaret exclaimed, and wrapped Lucianne in a spontaneous hug when she whispered a grateful, “Thank you, Lucy.”

After their brutal exchange from the first day, Margaret would have never thought that she could find a friend in Lucianne, neither did she think that Lucianne would connect her to people who could help her get what she began wanting since she realized that she didn’t have to be a rogue forever – a chance to make an impact in someone’s life, leaving them in a better place than the one they were in before.

Lucianne squeezed her in return until her ringing phone made them let go of each other. Lucianne and everyone else saw the word 'Greg' on the lit screen before she swiped to answer his call. Greg spoke so speedily that Lucianne could easily tell that this was an emergency.

When Greg was halfway through, Lucianne's eyes turned onyx as her breathing hastened. Xandar felt her anger, and tried mind-linking her but he couldn't reach her, so he linked Christian.

Christian explained, 'Well, the bad news is that it's Greg. The good news is that she's pissed.' When Christian noticed Lucianne's clenched fist and Lewis's small hand reaching to gently pat on his aunt's increasingly hot cheeks, the duke added, 'Really pissed. I'm genuinely hoping that she won't combust, cuz. You might get burned trying to put out her flames.'

Xandar immediately carried Reida as he linked, 'I should go to her.'

'No no. Wait, she's going to speak.'

Lucianne muttered in a voice so calm and monotonous that any creature who didn't know her wouldn't be able to guess what was really going on in her mind, "I'll send word to Dalloway. We'll meet you in the Den soon. Thank you, Greg."

The only thing Greg said after that was, "Please don't bring the princess this time, My Queen." He knew for a fact that she was enraged because her voice only went that low and that flat when she was controlling her anger.

"We're on the same page there. I don't plan to. See you soon."

After she hung up, her eyes locked with Christian's glazed over ones briefly before the duke murmured to Xandar, 'Looks like we're working through the weekend again, cuz.'

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 110 - Tips

0 5 minutes read

The defense ministers, Margaret and her mavericks, Lucianne, Xandar and Christian reached the Den. Chief Dalloway, who was escorting Kate, looked at the duke, as if asking him an unspoken question.

Greg got the message, and pointed at the only chair at the side and said, "Over there, Chief."

Despite being surprised that this duke actually addressed him politely, he complied.

Kate was confused. What was happening? And why did she have to go first?

None of her friends knew what this was about, not even Margaret. But Tate knew, and it was killing him and his wolf to not say a thing to their mate. Lucianne even had to discuss with Xandar for two whole minutes before deciding whether they should tell Tate. Even now, she wasn't sure if she made the right decision. She hated to be the reason that Tate had to keep something from his mate, who he had been trying so hard to get close to.

The present test was to see how many in Margaret's pack knew about what Kate had been doing. The royal family members and defense ministers stood at parts of the room that gave them a good view of the clueless faces, which they hoped would remain clueless. Greg's top four were just mindlessly walking around the room as they waited like it was just another business day for them.

Lucianne envied at how casually Alissa could chew gum. Although the queen kept her composure, she was boiling like a kettle on the inside. She gave her word that should there be betrayal or treachery, she'd torture the traitor until she was satisfied.

She hadn't seen the evidence Greg and the mavericks found against Kate yet, and she hoped for Kate's sake that there was a plausible explanation to whatever Greg found, but that was unlikely.

Xandar's hand was on her shoulder, his thumbs drawing comforting circles there. Lucianne offered him a small smile and touched him lightly on his chest before Greg got the ball rolling, "Kate, how long have you been in contact with this creature named Rudolpho?"

Kate's body stiffened.

Lucianne and the others were relieved to see that Margaret and her followers were squinting their eyes, looking confused and muttering 'who?' to each other at this point.

Kate cleared her throat and uttered, "I don't know who that is."

Greg expected that answer because not everyone knew that deleted messages could be retrieved. The duke continued reading from the screen and questioning monotonously, "You don't know who you've been sending 'I love you. Please be safe.' text messages to? Really?"

Margaret's confused eyes widened in ferocity when she scowled at Kate, waiting for her answer. They weren't supposed to be sending messages to anyone! It was a safety precaution that their pack had agreed to take. They were allowed to have phones for any function EXCEPT communication.

Kate gulped and insisted, "If that's in there, it's fake. You must have put it in."

Lucianne saw the way her foot subtly moved and her eyes averted when she said that. Kate's steady voice made her a good liar, but her less-than-perfect body language showed that she wasn't good enough. The queen walked up to Kate and asked again in a voice that sent a chill down everyone's spines, "You're certain that the duke is lying, Kate? Think very carefully before you answer me."

Kate neglected that warning, and immediately insisted, "It's fake! We're not allowed to contact anyone! I didn't do it! This high-tech guy and his goons must have gotten it into the system to frame me somehow."

Azalea asked in genuine confusion, "There are forty of us. Why frame you?"

"I don't know, Az, okay?"

Lucianne saw the body signals of a liar again, and it pissed her off that she was being lied to in her face more than once. Her eyes turned blue, emitting her Authority as she pinned Kate to her chair and asked, "Is the duke lying?"

Kate fidgeted in her seat, trying to fight off the compulsion but she couldn't so she muttered, "No."

That made some of her pack members gasp, and half of them growled as they shot Kate a glare that could have burned through her skin.

Lucianne continued asking, "Who is Rudolpho?"

Tears started forming in her eyes at the way she was made to go against her will when she answered, "My...boyfriend."

Azalea hissed in a whisper, "What the f*ck?! Since when?!"

Kate was glaring at Lucianne now. She never hated anyone more at that point. Lucianne remained unperturbed when she repeated, "Since when?"

"Two years ago."

"So, he's a chosen boyfriend, not a bonded one?"

"Yes."

Margaret let out a low growl and was about to pounce forward out of pure rage had Tate not held her back. The Alpha was beyond relieved that she was behaving this way. At least his mate was clear from this.

Lucianne proceeded to ask Kate, "Does he know about the conditional pardon?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"That it wouldn't mean anything soon because they have a plan to remove you."

Xandar was at his wife's side within the second as he glowered at the woman in the chair. Greg came over, too. Both were already trying to rein in their animals who demanded to be released after what they just heard.

Lucianne scoffed darkly and asked, "So...your boyfriend and his pack are the ones we're after?"

"Partly."

"Meaning?"

"They're collaborating with a few other groups. I wasn't told how many. He said the less I know, the better."

“Well, he got that right. Too bad he already told you so much. Anyway, did you know about the Blue Crescent attack?”

Kate tried with all her might to press her lips together but eventually she answered, “Yes.”

“So, the attack wasn’t just an attack, was it? It was also supposed to be your escape route.”

“Yes.”

“Who was supposed to take you away?”

Kate was breathing heavily in anger now as she said, “A discretus. I don’t know his name.”

“Where were they supposed to take you?”

Kate smirked. “I don’t know.”

Greg’s hand was about to go to Kate’s neck for the way she was behaving but Lucianne stopped him when she spoke using a gentler tone, “Not yet, Greg.”

Her attention returned to Kate. “So, it’s safe to assume that you’ve met up with him before?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

Hailey and Ivory turned more alert and immediately brought up the hologram of the map as their index fingers got ready to pinpoint every location they were about to hear.

“Grotte, Ravin, Forêt, Bordure, Talus.”

Margaret lost it when she yelled, “So, basically, EVERYWHERE we’ve been in the past two years!” Kate bit her lip and refused to meet her leader’s eyes.

Greg then confirmed Kate’s account, “Those locations are also where her texts were sent from, My Queen.”

Lucianne proceeded to ask Greg, “And the texts from Rudolpho? Where were they sent from?”

In a flat, discontented voice, Greg replied, “The almighty, magical Forest of Oderem, My Queen.”