

Chapter 11

After Stella closed the door behind her, she sniffled once and hung her head low to wipe away her stray tears as Lucianne approached her. Without a word, the queen wrapped Stella in a hug. The teenager was shocked at first but when she registered Lucianne's scent, her human and wolf parts let themselves tear-up in her embrace for a moment before feeling bad about it and gently pushing the queen away.

"We'll take care of you and your mother, Stella. Don't worry, okay?" Lucianne assured her with a hand on her shoulder.

Stella nodded in obedience and managed a meek smile. Lucianne then continued in a soft voice, "Why don't you follow Officer Laila and go get some water and something to eat, Stella. We'll discuss where you'll stay for the time being to make it easier for you to visit your mother, and I'll let you know."

She nodded again, and saw that Officer Laila was ready to lead her away with a warm smile. Stella took only two steps before she turned back around and hesitated, "Um..."

Lucianne saw that she was going to say something. Xandar, Christian and Tate stiffened in response. Everyone was silently praying that Stella wasn't going to lie like her mother asked her to do. Lying to authoritative figures carried a sentence for both adults and children above the age of twelve. Needless to say, lying to the royal family carried an even heavier sentence. Lucianne was even considering taking a few steps back and pushing Tate forward instead, so that if Stella did lie, the

teenager would technically be lying to Tate, not her.

Before Lucianne could do that, Stella stammered as she admitted, "Before...I didn't...wh-when Officer Katie a-asked about my dad—birth father's identity...I lied. Can I get a do-over on that part?"

The men behind Lucianne were internally relieved. Christian even sighed aloud. Tate was particularly thankful, and his wolf felt...proud of what Stella was doing.

Lucianne smiled radiantly as she gave Stella a brief hug and said, "Thank you for owning up, Stella. You can tell Officer Laila on the way, okay?"

"Yeah, okay. Thank you, uh...queen...Your Highness."

"It's just 'Lucy', Stella. Go on, now."

After Officer Laila took Stella to the cafeteria, Lucianne slumped against the wall and muttered, "Thank Goddess."

"True that, My Queen. True that," Christian said with a satisfied smile.

On the side, Deputy Chief Laurent asked, "Should we deploy troops to collect the rest of the rogues in their pack, Your Highnesses?"

Oh right. They almost forgot about that part.

Xandar and Lucianne exchanged a glance with Tate before Lucianne gave out the order, "Yes, but...try to get everyone back here alive please, Laurent. Kill only if it's for self-defense."

"Understood, My Queen," she responded in a lower tone before glancing apologetically at Tate and leaving their circle to send word to the lycan warriors.

"Tate," Lucianne began.

Tate responded with a worried but grateful smile even before she finished, "I would have done the same thing, Lucy. Don't worry about it."

When the atmosphere eased, Christian asked cheerfully, "So, who's taking the teenager?"

"What?" Tate asked with widened eyes.

Christian explained, "Well, I doubt she can go back and forth with you to and from White Blood, Alpha. It's too far from her mother. Annie and I could take her in for now, if you don't mind."

After some thinking, Lucianne said, "Maybe it's better if she stayed with us, Xandar." When her husband's eyes met hers, she elaborated, "Her wolf trusts us."

Christian snorted and rebutted, "No no no no no, my Queen. You must have heard the teenager wrong. Her wolf trusts you, not my cousin." With a hand on his best friend's shoulder, the duke continued, "It's hard to trust him. I mean look at him, especially after you marked him. Bigger. Scarier. Deathlier. Angr – oof!" the duke groaned when Xandar hit the back of his head, eliciting Lucianne's giggles.

That sound tickled the king's heart, and the bigger, scarier and deathlier animal in his head cooed in tenderness. With smiling eyes, he agreed, "We can take her in for the time being. We have a few extra rooms at home anyway."

"Great!" Lucianne exclaimed. She then turned to her Alpha friend and asked, "So, how often are you coming down here, Tate?"

Tate scratched the back of his head as he admitted, "Well, I'm thinking of staying actually. I'll handle pack business from here. Mannon will take care of the face-to-face things back in White Blood. I think there's a hotel not far down the street."

"You could stay with us. You'll get to know Stella better too," Lucianne offered, hoping that he would accept.

"Oh no, Lucy. I couldn't impose."

Xandar insisted, "You won't be. It'll be fine."

Tate looked at the king, and he asked like he once did before, "Are you sure, Your Highness?"

Christian chuckled at a memory they all shared, and Xandar patted him on his shoulder as he repeated the same words from the previous time, "I trust you."

Tate was touched. "Well then, who am I to refuse? Thank you, Xandar. And you too, Lucy."

Xandar continued, "Don't worry about it. The only thing that's off-limits in the house are the chocolate bars in the fridge. I WILL know if even one goes missing."

Tate and Christian laughed but Lucianne could only try to suppress a shy smile when her mate's loving and knowing gaze fixed on her because she was the one who stole his chocolate bar last time...or the last few times, not that he minded anyway.

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Stella was visibly relieved when Lucianne told her that she was going to stay with her. The teenager thought she was going to be thrown into one of the cleaner cells in prison at worst, and put into a temporary room before being sent to a juvenile

institution at best. She never expected to be able to live in the queen's home.

After leaving the police station, Xandar and Lucianne brought Tate and Stella to a mall to pick out some clothes before returning to Xandar and Lucianne's villa. They let Stella pick her room, and she picked the smallest one with the smallest window. Tate chose to live right next to her in case she needed anything.

Xandar and Lucianne still had a few hours to kill before the vampire rendezvous, so they showered quickly, and Lucianne breast fed Reida right after. The couple watched their baby daughter looking around with curious lilac eyes as her tiny hands wrapped tightly around Xandar's pinky finger, holding it close to her small chest, making the fiercest animal in the kingdom melt in blissful happiness.

When Reida dozed off with her mother's nipple still in her mouth, Lucianne very carefully detached herself from her daughter before Xandar helped pull down her shirt as he pecked a sweet kiss on her cheek, uttering, "You're amazing."

A red tinge appeared on her cheeks like it always did whenever Xandar said those words to her. Lucianne carried Reida to the nursery, and gently placed her into the cot. The happy parents stood there and just watched their child sleep, listening to her breathing that sounded as gentle as the morning breeze.

When it was time to get ready, they reluctantly left Mrs Parker to the baby. Half-an-hour to the rendezvous appointment, they said goodbye to Tate, and made sure Stella was well settled-in before they made their way to Polje.

16:28 

At 9:58 pm, Xandar, Lucianne, Christian, Toby, Phelton, Weaver, Yarrington, Lovelace, Chief Dalloway, General Langford and ten lycan warriors stepped onto the large open space beneath the full moon. They waited for the vampires to appear. And at ten sharp, they did. About twenty pale-skinned creatures emerged from the thick forest, their teal-green eyes glimmered in the darkness.

A vampire, unlike a lycan or werewolf, was born with one of four distinct abilities: speed as quick as lycans, called a *velox*; strength superior to werewolves but inferior to lycans, called a *fortis*; invisibility, called a *discretus*; or the most-feared, mind-manipulation, called a *decipio*.

Only a ruler and his rightful heir was a *velox*, *fortis*, *discretus* and *decipio* all at once. Apart from a vampire's general scent, the only thing they all had in common with each other was venomous fangs that could weaken its prey or enemy long enough for the predators to drain them of their blood. Only vampires themselves and their mates were immune to the venom.

The woman in the middle, with strawberry-blonde hair that touched her shoulders, stepped forward with a grim expression. Her eyes were not teal-green like the rest, but were as bright as polished emeralds, and she wore a black leather pantsuit. Her frown and furrowed eyebrows showed that she was only there because she had to be.