

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 121 - Tips

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Lucianne kept a safe distance from Xandar, trying to come up with a plan as he growled at her. Xandar then linked his late father in a low, homicidal tone, 'Tell me where she is, or I'll kill you and mom.'

That was when he realized something was off. There was nothing at the other end of the link. And it was even more odd that he wasn't detecting his father's scent. He was smelling something...unusual, beautiful. Butterfly pea and jasmine. Despite being manipulated, he knew of only one creature who had that scent, and his mood instantly softened with that realization.

'Xandar, darling,' Lucianne linked him gently as she took slow steps towards him.

When Xandar saw his father approaching him, he snarled in defense to keep him at a distance. Lucianne backed away, and he replied to her link in the softest and gentlest tone, 'Lucianne, h-how are you mind-linking me? Wait, that's not important right now. Where are you, baby? What do you see around you? I can smell you but I can't see you. Tell me where you are, my love. Please. Let me come get you.'

'I'm right here, Xandar. I'm right in front of you. If you're seeing someone else, know that it's not real. It's me. I'm standing right in front of you. Trust your nose, Xandar. Feel me. I'm not whoever you're being made to see.'

His snarling stopped, and his animal began feeling the energy of the creature standing before him. It exuded a warmth that touched his soul and wrapped his heart, and an inviting presence that made him gravitate towards it. He knew his father. He was anything but inviting, especially after Xandar offered perspectives that went against his own and took stances that strayed from convention.

It was weird to accept that he was staring at his mate when he could only see his father down to the finest details of the faint wrinkles on the old man's face. By instinct, he closed his eyes and took a few more moments to confirm that it was highly possible that it really was Lucianne who was in front of him. Xandar then took very slow steps towards her.

Juan, Toby and Christian went the most berserk at the sight, thinking that Xandar was going to attack Lucianne. Lucianne raised a hand to get them to

stop growling, shouting or banging at the invisible wall that Xandar created. The vigils came to help but the moment they stepped into the space that no wolf or lycan could, Lucianne's stop sign made them halt.

They watched from a small distance as they got ready to push her away if Xandar lost control. The queen's sapphire eyes channeled an assurance to her family, friends and allies that she was going to be okay.

Very carefully, Lucianne channeled her Authority. That was when Xandar, with eyes still closed, linked her again in awe, 'Baby, is that coming from you? That power. It feels like...like...'

'Like an Authority?' Lucianne chuckled through their link, and his heart melted at the sound, and it began to flutter when she continued, 'I didn't know that it was, not until you told me.'

'I told you?' He asked doubtfully as he went even closer. Lucianne decided to stay at her spot, to not rush him and let him come to her.

'Yes, darling. About two weeks after we first met, you told me that I had this power, that I was bestowed the Queen's Authority. You made me realize that I have it, that you felt it.'

'Two weeks...' Xandar was made to think that he never spoke to Lucianne again since the second day of them finding each other, since she rejected him. The decipios were trying to tamper with the mind-link between them but there seemed to be something that was keeping them out, and that something was Lucianne's Authority.

'Yes, Xandar. Two weeks. We were in my room, and you told me about this. You explained how you channeled your Authority, teaching me how to channel my own.'

'Your room,' he repeated as he cracked his head for such a time before blurting out his pressing question, 'You mean...does this mean you're taking back your rejection?'

He could feel amused disbelief, but it didn't feel like that emotion was his. He couldn't understand where it was coming from. Lucianne's firm link dominated

his mind again when she declared, 'Dearest, I never rejected you. I could never. I love you.'

His animal cooed aloud, and the last three words made him so happy that he pounced on her before any vigil was fast enough to stop him, which sent a second round of heart attacks amongst those watching.

After realizing that Lucianne was still safe, the vigils sighed in relief. Toby used the invisible wall for support as he recovered from the shock. 'Goddess, I'm going to die young with this amount of stress,' he thought to himself.

Xandar's eyes were still closed as his tail wagged, which further infuriated the decipio-proditors. Lucianne could feel from the decreased compression in Xandar's mind that the thirty decipios were down to twenty-three, and they were giving it their all, trying inexplicably hard to make Xandar see what they wanted him to see, trying to pull him away from her.

Some of them knew that their plan was failing. The most strategic ones were even trying to come up with a Plan B as they continued praying that Plan A would still pull through.

'You love me?' Xandar asked again as he hovered just slightly over her, his nose close to her forehead.

Lucianne leaned closer to his nose as she linked affectionately, 'Of course I love you, darling. I'm your mate.' In a possessive whisper, she added, 'And you're MINE.'

Without remembering he had the King's Authority, Xandar channeled the archaic power because that seemed to be the only way his animal knew could connect to the Queen's Authority, to connect with his mate.

The manipulation effects wore off in waves as their combined power cleared his mind. When his darkened green eyes returned to lilac, Lucianne was so happy and relieved that she nuzzled his nose and the rest of his face.

His animal cooed and buried his face in her neck, greedily taking in her scent before he asked in his deep voice, 'Babe, I don't remember what exactly happened yet but I'm going to think that I was being manipulated. Can you tell me why I'm on top of you when we're not in our bedroom?'

Lucianne chuckled before responding, 'Because you're my indecent beast, My King.'

He moved away from her neck and smirked, nudging her nose when he argued, 'I'm not THAT indecent.' After getting off, he offered her his hand like a gentleman as he linked, 'Come, My Queen. Let's finish this.'

The decipio-proditors put the impromptu Plan B into action, manipulating the king and queen's allies and friends to attack them instead.

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It didn't take as much force to mentally invade those without the king's strength and power, but the situation still annoyed the proditors because most of their victims were shutting their eyes and refusing to follow through with what they wanted them to do.

They began putting fake sounds into the manipulations just to get their victims to move towards a particular direction. Everyone ended up running into trees and each other rather than letting the fabricated knowledge make them give into their urge to attack and kill.

Some of those who were manipulated by more skillful decipios did end up attacking Lucianne and Xandar, who had to watch each other's backs as they tried to channel their Authorities again.

Right before one sneaky discretus-hybrid could plunge its claws right through Lucianne's nape, a dash of breeze pushed him away, making him fall to the ground. The hybrid quivered in fear at the sight of a ferocious pair of emerald eyes boring into his blue orbs.

Pellethia plunged her claws right through the hybrid's being, relishing in his shrieks before Lucianne's casual link calmed her down when the queen said, 'Oh. Hi, Pelly. You're here!'

The empress got up, hurriedly dusted the dirt off her pants, and turned her attention to them when she said, "I am so sorry we're late, Aunt Lucy, Uncle Xandar."

Lucianne responded, 'Don't worry about it. You're here now. Let's finish this. Saxum is somewhere over there, I think.'

“On it.” Pellethia sprinted and went looking for the leader with Octavia and Amber right behind her, albeit catching up slower since neither of them had the abilities of a velox.

Saxum and a few alert and quicker decipios had begun retreating the moment they saw Pellethia and her entire cavalry entering the battlefield. Their instinct was to return to Neptune’s warehouse, but logic told them that they might not be able to outrun whoever was chasing them down, so the current plan was to find a place to hide.

On the battleground, Gerella’s eyes scanned the place, feeling a mix of relief and guilt when she saw some of her friends unconscious but others dead. She was immensely grateful that none of the children were brought here.

Her blue orbs didn’t stop searching until she found Toby. She gazed at his wolf in awe as the rhythm of his blood sang to her. Her smile faltered when she saw his eyes were darkened green from the manipulation, and he was walking right into Rudolpho’s claws that no one could see, seeing that he was a discretus. Gerella sprinted to Toby and pushed him away, so Rudolpho’s claws plunged through her arm as she shrieked in anguish.

The fellow discretus looked at Gerella like he was asking ‘what are you doing?’, and she simply said, “Rudolpho, get your fvcking claws OUT OF ME!”

Although still confused, Rudolpho retracted his claws as Gerella gr0aned. It was the first time she felt blessed having the healing abilities of a wolf.

Before Rudolpho could start lecturing her about her loyalty, Alissa kicked him in the head and he fell to the ground unconscious as she muttered, “Asshole.” Alissa was very tempted to use the lighter in her back pocket but felt that she wasn’t the right person to finish him off the way she wanted to, so Rudolpho was just left on the ground like the others.

Toby came out of the manipulation when Joseph, his decipio partner, sped up bringing him back to reality. Gerella knelt by his side as she frantically asked, “Toby. Toby, are you okay? Can you hear me?”

Toby was blinking, trying to recall what happened in the last minute when his mind was invaded. When he remembered being pushed away and falling, then looking up at the creature who made him fall, his heart ached and his

vessels constricted when the memory of Rudolpho attacking Gerella was presented to his mind.

“Toby! Can you hear me?!” Gerella continued yelling before looking at Joseph and asking, “What’s wrong with him? Why can’t he hear me?”

She was pulled into a sudden embrace, and her shock was evident from her wide eyes. Toby shifted back and leaned his forehead against hers when he said, “Please don’t do that again, Ella. That was fvcking terrifying.”

Joseph left the two alone as Gerella sighed in relief when Toby finally spoke. Her arms circled his neck, and she hugged him back as she whispered an endless stream of ‘I was wrong. I’m sorry’. Toby pressed her deeper into his embrace as he kept repeating the words, “Shh, it’s alright.”

The two then felt something deep within their hearts, which was left bare and in pain after Toby recited his part of the rejection. The moment Toby pulled Gerella into his arms, and Gerella embraced him in return, they felt a small flame, a gentle warmth filling the emptiness that was left there since their last encounter with one another. That flame was a sign that the rejection had been retracted, its effects lifted. Although one could verbally retract a rejection to keep the mate bond alive, a simple act of love and affection would also have the effect of rekindling the bond, so long as that act is reciprocated, as Gerella was reciprocating now.

The wolves and lycans were having a much easier time seeing that Rafael had already put most of the proditors to sleep. His fiery eyes exhibited his ferocity and anger when he identified the remaining decipio-proditors. The most powerful decipio then entered the proditors’ minds all at once, making them leap to the ground and walk towards him like trained pets before shutting down their minds as well.

In the midst of cooing Ella, Toby saw Rafael do what he did, and the defense minister couldn’t stop himself from saying, “That’s pretty neat.”

Rafael turned to Toby with a humble smile and nodded in acknowledgement before uttering, “Thank you, Toby.”

Seeing that the situation around them was under better control, Lucianne took a quick look at her best friend’s mate and couldn’t help herself from smiling before she sprinted to where Pellethia headed to earlier.

Xandar, Greg and Christian ran after the white lycan, wondering how Lucianne could always manage to move on to the next prey without much of a break in between.

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Pellethia only had to speed for a while before Saxum and the runaway proditors came into view. She entered their minds and made them think that they were running into a wall, bringing them to an abrupt halt. The empress put the decipios to sleep, and only Saxum was left standing.

The empress stood a safe distance from the leader when she got straight to the point, "How sure are you that my father killed your family? Who told you that was what happened?"

Saxum saw only Pellethia and himself in a white space. He scoffed when he realized what she was doing before he fired back with his own question, "You're going to manipulate me into thinking that what I know is a lie."

"No. I'm making you think that you have nowhere to go so that I get my answers."

"What right do you have to demand answers? You're just a spoiled little princess who was born into a luxury of choices and freedom, never needing to care how the odd ones have to fare because daddy provided everything. I don't answer to any ruler, especially not one who doesn't even have the basic skill of wielding an Authority."

That wasn't the first time Pellethia was being ridiculed for not having that archaic power, so she merely simpered when she retorted, "Funny how this spoiled little princess didn't even need the basic skill of wielding an Authority to trap you and put your runaway friends to sleep, Saxum."

Pellethia found strength in her own words, confidence in self-recognition of her worth even without the archaic power. She couldn't see it but a streak in her hair glowed in bright green, and roots that seemingly came out of nowhere crept up Saxum's body, holding him in place.

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Lucianne and the others arrived, and they felt an energy radiating from Pellethia's being. Her wide, sapphire eyes met Octavia's proud ones as they exchanged smiles, both internally happy for Pellethia that she finally unlocked the Empress's Authority, wielding it like it was second nature to her.

Everyone's sights then went to the roots around Saxum, and Xandar wondered if those was what he thought they were.

His question was answered when some roots appeared next to Christian, making the duke flinch. But when a familiar beige flower with red polka dots grew instead of the strangulating structures they see on Saxum, Christian plucked the flower and awkwardly conveyed his thanks with a hand gesture before he linked his cousins and cousin-in-law, 'The Forest of Oderem is miles away. How the hell did this get here?'

Greg found this the perfect moment to retort by simply saying, 'Magic.'

When Christian's eyes narrowed, Xandar explained, 'Pelly's Authority must be one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful, in history. Not only can she control the magical parts of her empire now, she can summon any living beings there to help her if she were in foreign territory. No emperor had ever managed such a feat.'

Pellethia wanted the truth. Nothing but the truth. The forest heard her silent command, and small flowers with transparent petals grew and bloomed in the roots closest to Saxum's face. The odor exuded made Saxum more susceptible to heeding to Pellethia's demand.

Pellethia didn't know just yet what the flowers were for so she emitted her Authority with full force when she asked, "Who. Told. You."

"The witch and vampire who raised me."

"Do this witch and vampire have names?"

"They never gave it to me, saying that it was for my own safety."

Pellethia didn't see the point in pressing for the witch's identity any further. Witches only lived to 500 years old, so it was no doubt that whoever it was was already dead.

"Is the vampire still alive?"

“Died four centuries ago.”

“Did either of them ever leave the forest?”

“Not that I recall.”

“Anyone came to visit her to hand them supplies?”

“Our supplies are found all around the forest. There was no need for external sources.”

“I see,” Pellethia reduced the intensity of her power and continued her line of questioning, “They said my father killed your family?”

“He ordered their assassinations. Kosh might have gotten someone else to do the dirty work for all I know.” The hateful way he said the late emperor’s name did not go unnoticed.

Pellethia continued, “Does the name ‘Maddock’ ring a bell?”

“No.” Saxum mumbled, then added on his own, “Who’s he?”

Looking into his angered but tired blue eyes, she simply murmured, “Someone I hope didn’t lie to me.”

Unbeknownst to him, a complex web of possibilities was expanding in Pellethia’s mind. She couldn’t help but feel that Saxum might just be acting based on false information he was brought up to think was the truth.

“The three scientists you’re working with – where are they?”

“In their lab.”

“And where is that?”

“It’s accessible by an inn, owned by a lycan named Vent.”

Greg immediately refuted, “That’s a lie. My people searched that place. There’s no such room.”

The flowers made Saxum clarify, "It's an underground lab that's only accessible through their freezer. The keypad is on one of the shelves, hidden by blocks of cheese. Maybe that's how your people missed it."

"Bastards." Greg muttered.

When no one else had anymore questions, Pellethia put Saxum to sleep, and the vigils and custodes who arrived began carrying Saxum and the proditors back to the empire as the rulers discussed their next move.

When Greg was given the green light to go after the scientists, he only had one question, "Am I allowed to end them as I please?"

The rulers mind-linked amongst themselves. Pellethia voted 'yes' without much thought, as did Xandar. After the whole mess those three caused, they were lucky that the decision was to end them. However the duke decided to torture them first was simply a punishment before death.

The four of them agreed that subjecting the triplets to a cycle of eternal torture wasn't wise because they didn't want to risk them breaking out and then disappearing. If Greg couldn't locate them for so long with his reach and network, the rulers knew that they themselves stood less of a chance if it happened to them.

After the discussion, Lucianne gave Greg a firm nod and uttered, "Do as you please."

Xandar added, "As long as they end up dead."

Greg rolled his eyes before replying, "That goes without saying. I'll take my leave now. Have fun collecting the other hybrids from Neptune's warehouse."

Octavia recalled something, then asked as Greg was walking away, "You Grace, do you need a few of us to help carry..."

Without looking back, Greg waved a hand and replied, "No, we'll be fine. I doubt your kind is that heavy."

Greg left with twenty of his followers, and linked the rest that were scattered around the rogue world to make sure that Vent didn't leave his inn.

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Gerella led everyone to the warehouse, and the kids were so happy to see her that they ran into her open arms without giving much thought about the new faces with her. She was relieved beyond words that they were all okay. She thought that a few of them would have died, but the death on the battlefield compensated for any deaths of children that were sustained during the triplets' experiment.

Neptune wasn't with them because he had already fled on his own without telling anyone the moment he received the link about trouble from Saxum. The adults left in the warehouse weren't fighters, so they gave in when the vigils, custodes and warriors escorted them out. The kids were the least affected since the adults told them that they were simply going on another trip.

A few little boys' eyes sparkled in awe when they were walking past Lucianne, and one of them even stopped right in front of her as his babysitter went ahead with her own daughters. His mother passed out during the Bordure attack and was now being carried by one of the lycans, so his babysitter took over caring for the little boy as they waited for his mother to regain consciousness.

The way the boy's eyes glued to Lucianne made Xandar mutter, "Goddess, hasn't this been a long enough day?"

Lucianne lowered herself and looked at the boy with a welcoming smile. He looked a little intimidated, so Lucianne carefully opened her palm like she was asking for his hand. After blinking his eyes for a moment, his little hand went to hers. He liked how warm it felt.

"What's your name, sweetheart?" Lucianne asked gently.

"M-Michael," he answered shyly. "W-What's your name?"

"It's Lucy." She replied, gently touching his hair.

He gazed at his babysitter nervously, and that was when Lucianne realized that most of the adults had stopped walking as they watched her. Michael turned back to Lucianne and asked, "A-Are you our new friend, Lucy? Are we going to sleep in the same room at bedtime?"

Oh, hell no.

Xandar's hand went to Lucianne's shoulder as he immediately said, "Actually, Lucy and I share a room at bedtime, Michael."

Michael looked up at the tallest creature he had ever seen when he said innocently, "We only have one bed left in our room at home. Can you pick another room?"

Little piece of sh!t.

Before Xandar said another word, Lucianne gently hit his leg with the back of her hand to stop him from speaking before she spoke to Michael again, "Michael, we are going to find you and your family a new home, one that is as comfortable as your bedroom in your old home, okay?"

"Will you be living with us?"

"No, sweetheart. I'm sorry. But I'll come visit."

"Promise?" His pleading blue eyes gazed into her black-and-lilac orbs.

She smiled wider and pecked a kiss on his forehead, making Michael blush, before she whispered, "I promise. Come now. Let's get you to a...temporary place while we find you a suitable home."

As Lucianne held his hand and started walking, Michael asked, "What's 'temporary'?"

Lucianne entertained his questions to keep his mind distracted as they walked out of the warehouse together. She didn't know at that time that Michael was Chong and Regina's son. The boy inherited most of his maternal family's features, so no one matched him to his now dead father.

Most of the captured adults still didn't know what to make of the situation. They liked that the queen was not scaring the children, but they knew that what their administrators and leader did may leave them with a very bleak future.

There was a group of angry widows and widowers whose mates just died on the battlefield, but they knew better than to start a row under those circumstances, so they just barged out as some sobbed and others put on a brave face.

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At Vent's inn, Greg barged in without batting an eye for anyone present. Two of his followers took Vent, and the rest followed him to the kitchen. Even the chefs with choppers and knives didn't dare attack the duke. They merely watched in shock.

When Greg shoved the cheese off the shelf, the chefs sprinted out of the kitchen, not knowing that his followers were already stationed outside to lead them into a truck for a torture session. Jade did his thing with the keypad that was recessed into the shelf layer and got the hidden wall to open.

The moment the triplets heard the freezer door open, Ourelia shouted while looking into the test tube in her hand, "We didn't ask for you, Vent!"

The scoff they heard in response sent a shiver down their spines. Only one creature possessed a deep, dark scoff like that. Before any of the siblings could take another step or say another word, the duke's followers dashed forward to hold each of them in place, slamming them to the walls and pinning them there.

Greg caught Ourelia mouthing 'fvck' when their eyes locked, so he decided to start with her. His rough hand held her by her face when he asked, "Where the fvck are the bl00ds.uckers?"

Matthew questioned in return, "Does that even matter?" Desmond and Ivory kicked his kneecaps and heard him gr0an, a warning to never speak unless being spoken to.

Ourelia kept her lips sealed, but when Greg began squeezing her face and fracturing her facial bones, she choked out, "If you want...answers, why didn't you just...bring your new girlfriend to question us...instead?"

Greg NEVER had a girlfriend. The term was just used to push his buttons, but he prepared himself for this. Every living being with ears in the rogue world would have known about this weak spot of his by now. After what he did to the Kyltons and to himself, he knew that any future enemies he may have would use Lucianne to throw him off, to make him feel that he wasn't as great as he presented himself to be, to hurt his ego and make him feel pathetic since he couldn't get the woman he wanted.

Some would even take it a step further by saying that he didn't even have the balls to challenge his cousin. It wasn't about balls. It never was. Lucianne's happiness was the determining factor for his decision to just let her be, and if the shallow-headed imbeciles in the rogue world couldn't understand that, then fvck them.

Instead of retorting with anger to give his opponent the mildest satisfaction, Greg smirked darkly at Ourelia before responding, "The queen...had more pressing matters to attend to, and she KNEW that I wanted this assignment even without me saying so. Great chemistry we share, don't you think? Besides, having her use the Authority on you three would have been way too easy. She extracts answers with minimal torture. And you know me, I don't do minimal torture. Life is made to be much more interesting than that. Now, let's stay on subject. My subject. Where are the bloodsuckers you three put in a coma?"

Ourelia wasn't going to budge, and the crackling of her bones echoed through the walls of the laboratory. Nessa exclaimed, "Stop it, you idiot! Stop it!"

Greg's lilac eyes went to the other sister as his hand continued pressing Ourelia's cheekbones when he said, "Tell me what I want to know, then I'll stop...for now, that is."

Nessa breathed heavily as she sealed her lips. Alissa would have punched her in the gut had her eyes not given her away. She was looking at a tall, metal rack at the corner.

Greg snapped his fingers twice to ask for two followers as he too approached the rack. After moving the rack aside, he murmured, "Find the keypad. It must be the same as the one in the freezer."

The two pushed everything off each layer of the shelf as they searched. Greg stared at the wall as his hand ran along the one line he could find traveling from the floor to the ceiling. One of the two followers found the keypad, punched it the same six digits and the wall opened as Greg stepped aside.

He took two steps in, glanced at the place with furrowed brows, and walked over to the section where the children were kept. He heaved a heavy sigh before shaking his head, completely disgusted with the triplets.

The two followers stood at the entrance awaiting instructions, which Greg ultimately gave, “Get every bl00ds.ucker out of here. We’re sending them back to the empire. I only need three of you outside Vent’s place. The rest of you, load them to the cars and get them back.”

“Yes, Your Grace.”

When his people got to work, he himself got back to the main reason he made the trip. His anger seethed through his onyx orbs and sinister smile when he said, “As nauseating as you three are, I can’t deny that we still share something in common – a love for science. I’m more of a physics guy but I remember that you three love playing with chemicals. Now, where’s that thing you three liked to play with?”

He walked around the lab like it was his own home, searching for syringes of oleander that he once saw lying around their old lab when he first visited the place. The triplets once mentioned that they mixed oleander with other chemicals, seeing if a stronger substance would ever come out of it just in case some goody-two-shoes scientist came up with an antidote for the lethal poison in future.

Greg found what he was looking for at Matthew’s side of the table. He lifted one of the syringes, held it inches away from his nose as he took a whiff before setting it back on the table as he murmured to himself, “ Concentration of whatever the fvck you three added in this with oleander is too high. Anyone would die too fast with this one. How about this one?”

He sniffed the second syringe. “Concentration’s lower but not sure if it’s what I’m looking for. Hm,” his shoe tapped against the floor as he thought for a moment before he said, “You three like to do test runs, I recall. The Blue Crescent one was really an experiment to remember, and perhaps it helped in confirming or debunking whatever theories that you three had. I have a theory now. Let’s run a test, shall we?”

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To the triplets’ surprise, Greg walked over to Matthew, and he instructed, “Stick out your tongue.”

Matthew's eyes widened and kept his lips sealed. He knew exactly what would happen if any of that substance in the syringe made contact with his body.

Greg began complaining, "For Goddess sake, Callow. Can't you cooperate like how we cooperated with your white mice in Blue Crescent? It wasn't as if we killed all of them."

Desmond hit the back of Matthew's head while Ivory reached in to pull his tongue out as Desmond held his head back, stretching out the pink, moist structure. Greg murmured, "Careful, Ivory. Fingers at the tip. We don't want this on your skin. Hold him very, very still, Desmond."

The two complied and everyone ignored Matthew's indecipherable protests. Greg carefully pushed the plunger, and a single drop of liquid formed at the tip of the needle before falling onto Matthew's tongue. The three men observed the effects with interest.

Matthew screamed at the burning and stinging sensation. His eyes teared up at the anguish as the chemical burned through his tongue to form a distinct hole. But the ordeal didn't end there. The oleander was slowly travelling throughout his mouth and spreading to his respiratory system. If the triplets' data was right, Matthew was expected to die in less than six hours.

Greg merely nodded in acknowledgment of the results. "My bad. This one's still too strong to die by ingestion as well."

As he returned to the table to pick another syringe to play with, Nessa hissed, "You're despicable!"

Alissa's claw went right through Nessa's ear, making Nessa scream before she retracted her claw to let the blood ooze from the area.

Greg scoffed his signature dark scoff. "Do you even know what that word means?" He picked another syringe, looking at it through the ceiling lights before setting it down and moving on to the next syringe as he said, "It means 'morally reprehensible'. I doubt any of us in this room have the right to use that word against each other seeing that none of us are saints. Let's get real here – being who we are, the Goddess would most likely already have our places reserved in hell."

He picked a syringe and approached Nessa, towering over her when he declared in a low voice, "I'm not despicable, Callow. I'm deathly. You fvck with me or the people I care about, and this is what happens to you and those you care about."

He stuck the syringe into her collarbone and left it there for a moment because Nessa began struggling. Alissa and Hailey held her against the wall before Greg pressed the plunger all the way through. It took Nessa a whole twenty minutes of shaking, sweating, paling and croaking before she finally died on the floor.

Greg looked at the corpse and uttered, "Nope. Still not it. It has to be longer. I wonder how long it will take before I find the one I want."

He came back to the table, and that was when he looked at the neatly arranged row of syringes again as he said in mock amusement, "Ah, silly me. It's arranged by concentration. Highest to lowest from left to right. How could I have not known?" No one believed that he didn't know. Every damn syringe was labeled. In bold.

"Any last words, you two?" Greg asked, eyes still stuck to the table. "Matthew, you first."

Ivory let go of his tongue but Matthew clearly still couldn't frame coherent sentences or utter any clear words. Between the incomprehensible muffles, everyone caught a curse word or two...or more, but that was all anyone could understand.

He panted when he was done, which was when Greg said, "Thank you, Matthew. Ourelia, you n—"

"YOU WILL NEVER BEAT US! YOU WILL NEVER BE BETTER THAN US! EVEN ON OUR DEATHBEDS, EVEN IN HELL, NO ONE WILL FORGET THAT WE, THE CALLOWS, HAD BEEN THE ONLY ONES TO FOOL GREG CLAW!"

Greg's followers growled ferociously in their boss's defense, but Greg merely smirked as he offered Ourelia a sarcastic applause. "That was a very well thought-out speech. It's too bad that I can't say the same for your plan."

“Your intelligence is becoming more questionable as this drags on, Claw! You get NOTHING out of this! Not the status. Not the respect. Not the woman. NOTHING!”

“I’m starting to question YOUR intelligence now. I’d explain it to you but I’m a little short on time, so I’ll just let you figure out how you’re mistaken when you’re in hell.” He stuck the syringe with the lowest concentration of oleander into Ourelia, and Jade and Nani held her to the wall as her body weakened painfully slowly. Greg then did the same to Matthew.

Greg didn’t expect anything in return when he offered Lucianne his help. He didn’t want anything from her. Not the status, respect or even her. But as time went on, he realized that he was given those things in a way.

His status during the cooperation as one of the most trusted figures couldn’t be denied. Lucianne never made him or his people feel left out. If anything, she made them heard, and made them feel more belonged than they had ever been in the kingdom. On a personal level, he was given the status of an uncle when he thought he had been permanently cut-off from interacting with any future royal family members.

Respect from the creatures beyond Lucianne was more difficult to establish in the beginning of the cooperation but with time, it became doable. Even the non-rogues became more open to accepting and respecting him and his people as the decipio practice sessions went on. It was unbelievable but it happened.

As for getting the woman...he admitted that he couldn’t have her the way that he wanted to, but he did get to work with her, something he never thought he’d have the privilege of doing after their rough start when they first met. He ‘got her’ in the sense that he earned her trust and respect to the point that she trusted her daughter with him; to the point that she trusted him to bring back every bl00ds.ucker that was abducted; and to the point that he was given full discretion on ending the Callows however he deemed fit.

Greg wasn’t planning to demolish what they had built. He knew how deep a betrayal would cut, and it wasn’t as if he didn’t look forward to interacting with his niece. He might even teach her a few more curse words and then put the blame on his cousin just for a few laughs. The queen would no doubt find out eventually, but until that happened, it would be fun.

The ministers and warriors weren't so bad either. They weren't as slow as those that existed during his late uncle's reign. He even grew to enjoy working with them, as did his people.

Seeing that he had time to kill as everyone waited for Ourelia and Matthew to die, Greg had a look around their lab to see what other toys they had. When he was done browsing through the shelves and books, he started looking at random things – the clock, the switches, etc. Then, his eyes stopped at the bin, where he saw crumpled waste papers.

Since he had nothing better to do, he dug into their trash and emptied the bin onto the table. He carefully avoided the broken glass pieces as his fingers extracted the papers, which he assumed would have random equations and symbols written in illegible handwriting that he might not even understand.

He smoothed the first sheet, and found a sketch of the lightbulb they found in the hideout of the Forest of Oderem. He then smoothed the next sheet, and when he saw a beautifully-written paragraph of words and sentences that any non-scientist could understand, his relaxed mental gears got to work again.

His eyes burned at the initials he found at the end of the note, and he thanked Goddess that the siblings died at the two-hour mark. He couldn't wait any longer to get on to the next phase.

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0 5 minutes read

The mavericks carried the triplets' bodies out of the lab. On his way out with them, Greg said, "Finish up, Alissa. We'll wait for you outside. Make it quick."

"As you wish, Your Grace." Arson Arden embraced the name given to her by the media, took out the lighter from her back pocket and set the whole lab on fire, leaving no book or poison unscathed.

They left ten of their own to put out the fire and to make sure that everything was thoroughly burned as the remaining twenty royal mavericks headed to Ruby Lyworth's factory. Greg gave the guards at the gate two choices: stand in his way and die a slow death; or let him in and spend maybe a few years in prison and have a chance at freedom. It didn't take a lot of thinking for them to choose the latter option.

Greg made a beeline for Lyworth's office. Lyworth was about to run out of the door after being alerted by one of the guards, who pushed the emergency button that had been installed at the side of his earpiece. Greg grabbed her arm and pushed her back inside as he shut the door.

"Sit." He pointed at her office chair.

She complied, not knowing a better alternative.

Greg took the crumpled paper out of his pocket and placed it on her desk, right in front of her. When the duke saw how Ruby's face paled and her lips quiver, he got his answer. He scoffed.

"Ruby. Ruby. Ruby. What did I say about confidentiality and not pissing me off?"

She tried to lie. "Y-Your Grace, I...I didn't write this, I swear. The initials are probably a coincidence."

"Really?" Greg asked as he walked to one of the cabinets, pulled out a file and flipped through it until he found handwritten notes before slamming it on the table, putting the note right below the document in the file when he pressed again, "So, it's also a coincidence that the handwritings are so similar?"

Ruby continued to shake as her brain tried to come up with a plausible lie, but the duke's intimidating presence was making it very difficult.

"Think very carefully before deciding to tell me anything but the truth, Lyworth. I found this note, so it's safe to say that your new anonymous ally is as good as dead. Misleading me again is not going to end well for you. I'm already going to take you back to the kingdom, and we know how the queen's power works, don't we? If what you're about to say now isn't going to match what you're going to tell her when she compels you, we're going to have a problem. And I will submit a special request to end you personally. We all know that I've been in the queen's good books, so I have no doubt that my request will be approved. Now that I've made that clear, I need you to answer my very simple question: did you warn the new players after my departure?"

In an almost inaudible murmur, she said, "Yes."

“See, that wasn’t so hard, was it?” Greg replied somewhat harmlessly. Ruby was about to relax before Greg’s hand reached for her forearm and he bent it backwards to break her elbow. Her screams from the torture was nothing compared to what came after, when Greg’s claws plunged right through her arm.

He then left his claws there and dragged her out of the room as her blood made a trail on the floor. Greg even dragged her down the stairs since she was in too much pain to move on her own. “On the bright side, Lyworth, it would have been worse if you lied.”

Her employees complied with Greg’s command to surrender themselves to the kingdom’s authorities as soon as they saw what was being done to their employer. After dumping Lyworth with her goons at the police station, Greg made his way to the mortuary to meet up with his cousins and cousin-in-law.

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Xandar looked at Greg’s fresh victims for a moment before he muttered, “Was this really necessary, Greg?”

Greg shot him a glare. “You told me to end them. And I was granted full discretion on how to end them.”

“I know that. What I meant was...did you have to bring back the bodies?”

Lucianne was studying the triplets with interest. Christian didn’t think there was much to see seeing that they were just...grey.

Greg continued to argue with Xandar, “This. Is. Evidence. Evidence that we’ve done what we were assigned to do, cousin. I’ll have you know, in the rogue world, this is first-class delivery.”

That was when Lucianne managed a small smile and uttered gratefully, “Thank you, Greg.” Her eyes then returned to the corpses.

Greg’s sights returned to his cousin when he said, “At least the queen appreciates good work.”

“I’m not saying I don’t appreciate it but,” he sighed before asking, “What are you expecting us to do with these? Build a memorial?”

Lucianne suggested, "We could just cremate them then use the ashes as fertilizer for prison plants or something, darling."

Greg gestured at Lucianne when he told Xandar, "That's one way, though if it were me, I'd hang their bodies in town for a week for everyone to see. It might attract some insects that can be used for research, you'll never know."

Christian and Xandar shot Greg a disgusted look, which was when Greg muttered, "You two are boring."

Xandar immediately said, "We'll go with the cremation and fertilizer option." He turned and was about to drag Lucianne out with him before pausing when he spoke to Greg again, "Oh, I almost forgot. The empress and consort sent their thanks, Greg. The abducted ones are in the hospital. Most of them are safe and will recover."

"What do you mean 'most'?" Greg questioned. He liked his work to be perfect.

Lucianne's features hardened when she explained, "Five adults and all eight children had most of their brains...removed. The children even had strings of nerves connecting to all four limbs removed."

"That's sick." Greg commented as his facial features squinted in disgust.

Lucianne nodded and continued, "The surgeons are trying to see if they can find a way around the problem, but...it doesn't seem likely that there would be a solution. The most probable thing that would happen, we're told, is that life support for them would be cut off by the end of the week after any friends, relatives or family members had come forward to see the abducted ones one last time."

"Well, that s.ucks. Looks like we weren't fast enough." Greg noted ominously. "What about the hybrid leader? What's going to happen to him?"

Lucianne said, "Pelly is going to choke the truth out of Maddock in an hour's time. Would you like to come along?"

"Yes, I would. Thank you, My Queen."

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0 6 minutes read

In one of the many rooms in Pellethia's castle, Saxum was tied to a chair placed at the edge of the room, away from the table with three chairs, two of which were placed facing the third one. He would mind-link someone but the oleander and allicin cuffs weren't allowing him to do that.

Servants came to ask if he wanted water from time to time, and he declined every single time. He didn't want to drink something that could contain poison.

The doors finally opened again, and Pellethia and Octavia walked in this time, bringing a man that Saxum didn't see on the battlefield. Lucianne, Xandar, Christian and Greg took their seats at the opposite side of the room facing Saxum.

Pellethia and Octavia sat at the table and gestured to the single chair as Pellethia said, "Have a seat, Maddock."

The name caught Saxum's attention, and he began studying Maddock with interest but finding no familiarity in the old man. A servant came with a potted plant and placed it on the table, pushing it very near Maddock.

Maddock didn't dare move the plant away, so he adjusted his seat as he glanced at Saxum and asked, "And who may that be, Your Majesties?"

"That's Saxum."

Maddock's eyes bulged wide in horror. He took another look at the leader, who began feeling suspicious about his reaction. Saxum couldn't stop himself from asking, "Have we met?"

Maddock chose not to answer the question, and turned away. Pellethia then told Maddock, "I want the truth, Maddock. What happened during the assassination of Lady Luisa from our empire and Heros Pas from the Lycan Kingdom?" Saxum sat up upon hearing that.

Maddock insisted, "But I've told you what happened, Your Majesty. Your lawyers have also taken my deposition, and..." before he went on, the transparent flowers exuded its fragrance and Maddock suddenly found himself more willing to get straight to the point and tell the whole truth.

Pellethia didn't want to use her Authority to extract answers. She wanted Saxum to know that whatever was coming out of Maddock's mouth was the truth, and nothing was what she was compelling him to say.

Maddock coughed at the strong odor and waved his hand in front of his nose in hopes of removing some of its effects before he started, "Well, after Rosalie's death, Emperor Kosh discovered that Heros Pas was instrumental in poisoning her. When Kosh demanded that Lady Luisa cooperate in surrendering Heros, she refused."

Maddock was surprised by how frankly that whole thing came out, and that was when he realized what the plant was for. Where on earth did they get this from?

"Go on, Maddock." Octavia prompted, and Saxum's eyes grew wide in eagerness as well.

Maddock was forced to inhale the fragrance again before he continued, "After Luisa's refusal, she...wrote to me, asking me to convince Kosh to look past Rosalie's death and Reagan's subsequent insanity as simply an unfortunate consequence of a bond that was most likely created between the right souls but at the wrong time."

"Did you respond?" Pellethia asked.

"I did. I...have never stopped loving her." He pressed his lips together, knowing fully well that his confession just contradicted whatever he told the rulers the other day.

The flowers got him to talk again, so he went on, "I didn't like the idea of her choosing to be with Heros with that sort of...background but I also didn't like that Kosh wanted to kill the man when it was not within his jurisdiction to do so. Muddling jurisdictional lines was one thing, what made it more complicated was the fact that, by exerting his decisions upon a lycan without the Lycan King's permission..."

He sighed in dismay. "It was a recipe for diplomatic destruction. The newly-crowned king at that time still saw Heros as a trusted figure, so you can imagine how messy things would get if we touched him."

"So, you asked my father to reconsider his decision and he said no?"

"That is the...abridged version, Your Majesty. You see, Luisa then wrote to me saying that she was bearing twins. I saw this as good news because I thought that the late emperor would never want to leave a set of children fatherless. I was later proven to be wrong. Kosh agreed that the children,

despite having Heros's genes, shouldn't be touched. But he still wanted Heros's head. He didn't want a co-conspirator to a murder living a happy and lavish lifestyle in his empire, saying that letting him live here meant that he tolerated what the lycan did, which Kosh didn't."

After clearing his throat, Maddock proceeded to say, "It was clear that Luisa was...not going to give up her husband, neither did he want to give himself up since he felt that he was simply aiding the then Lycan King in what His Majesty wanted done. He claimed that whatever he did...was an act of duty and loyalty to the monarchy. I wrote to Heros, in secret, telling him that Kosh was never going to negotiate more than he already did, and that if he wanted to live, he'd have to return to lycan territory."

Maddock continued, "What was shocking was that Heros couldn't return because the medical professionals' demonstrations and protests were also calling for his death. He wasn't safe there. The other conspirators who were involved already had their homes burned, their families were dismissed from their jobs, and most had been harmed one way or another. The new Lycan King was still trying to smother the flames, and the authorities were searching for the culprits, but the fact remained that Heros could also be in danger if he ever went back. He was scared for his family and himself. He pleaded with me to change Kosh's mind again, but we both know your father, Your Majesty. Almost no one could change his mind. Your father...began to question my loyalty, seeing that I was pleading Luisa and Heros's case when the whole world was against them."

Pellethia murmured, "That's why you volunteered for the task – to prove your loyalty to the empire."

"That was one of the reasons. Another was to make sure that...the task was done right. The issue was that by the time the plan had to be executed, Luisa herself had garnered a lot of backlash for sleeping with and bearing the child of a conspirative murderer. The public wanted Heros dead, and they didn't care if she survived. The children? Most people felt that it was better for them to be brought up by a normal creature who neither killed nor supported killing. I volunteered because I wanted to make sure that ONLY Heros was killed, as Kosh ordered. Luisa was supposed to be left unharmed."

Maddock offered a firm nod. "She was a discretus, and on the night we entered their private residence...my mistake was to have every discretus on the team search the property when I myself faced Heros with only a velox and a decipio. We didn't see Luisa behind the curtain, covering the child she was

holding with her garment. Heros refused to tell me where she was, and I assumed she wasn't on the property. The moment I gave the signal to fire the arrow, I heard her scream and what I saw next...was...her appearing...in between...me and her mate...with an arrow going right through her and the child. My men fired the second arrow to kill Heros and the oleander killed him slowly. Luisa could heal like a lycan after being marked, but the fact that the poison was Oleander made the healing ability practically...useless, and she...didn't survive."

Maddock threw a guilty glance at Saxum and the lycans before his eyes returned to their Majesties once more. "What I told you about the names on infant garments was true, Your Majesties. We saw two names but we couldn't find the second child. We started tracking the governess whose things we found in the smallest room, and we found her eventually but...upon Kosh's compulsion, she admitted that she gave the child away. We went down that trail and lost it when it was collected by a witch. We attempted to enter the Forest of Oderem fifty-two times, but it kept us out using mist and odors."

"The mission was considered a failure. That's why everything was redacted." Pellethia muttered.

"That task was an embarrassing failure on our part, on my part. When we went looking for Saxum out of genuine concern, word got out about our search. And those in the empire who hated Heros and Luisa started going on a hunt. They were hunting down hybrids. Hybrids were mere children, and those who gave birth to them were already a very discriminated minority but they kept to themselves, so they were safe...until the urge to kill a murderer's descendant gave them an excuse to justify killing the innocent creatures' babies, saying that they may be hiding a future killer, claiming that the child they were holding was actually Saxum when, in reality, it was their own flesh and blood."

Pellethia questioned, "Weren't they tried? Weren't these people punished for their own murders?"

"Of course they were. That's how it stopped."

Octavia asked, "Why hasn't anyone of our generation read about this, or heard about this?"

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0 5 minutes read

Maddock explained, "You have, but you may not have known what you were reading about. The courts didn't call the victims 'hybrids'. Because they were merely infants, almost no description was given about them to protect their identities and families. Cases like Re V, Re Q..."

Pellethia asked in disbelief, "Those were hybrid cases? From the way the ambiguous way the judgments were written, it sounded as if the victims were children who were victimized and subsequently killed for being...different, like being homosexuals."

Maddock nodded. "That was the whole intention – to mislead future generations."

"My father ordered this?" Pellethia asked in dismay.

"Not...exactly. But objectively speaking, he did...influence it. You see, Your Majesty, anyone loyal to the emperor knew better than to do anything that may even minutely villainize their ruler, so everyone involved found ways to...walk around the problem."

Pellethia scoffed depressingly. "A cover-up is a cover-up. My father knew about this and he did nothing to stop it."

Maddock glanced at Saxum once more before he murmured to Pellethia, "He never wanted them dead. We really tried to find him. But we couldn't. Kosh felt...if the matter didn't die down...it might even cost him his throne, and consequently, your throne. As much as he was thinking about himself, he was thinking about you too, Pellethia."

Pellethia's eyes watered with tears of rage when she spat, "Hiding from history to secure the throne...is NOT the best example to set."

Maddock then spoke to her more gently than he had ever done during her reign, "And what would you have done if you were in our shoes, when the Forest of Oderem kept you out, when the hybrid massacre started before you even knew about it? I gather that you may have decapitated me for my own mistake but apart from that...would you have tried anything else that your father hadn't already tried to rectify the situation?"

After a long moment of contemplation, Pellethia replied in an angered whisper, "I know that I wouldn't have been able to sleep another night if I hid the truth."

Maddock smiled sadly. "None of us slept well after that failure. None. Not me, not the late vigils, and especially not your father."

Pellethia knew her father suffered from severe insomnia but she always thought it was due to work and missing her mother. She could never imagine that it was because of this.

Maddock then started speaking on his own accord, "Kosh...really did regret what he ordered. He admitted that he was blinded by the thirst for revenge, that if he could've just let one bad person live, many innocent creatures would have survived."

The former viscount turned to Saxum again, who was staring at the ground as he took this all in. Maddock cleared his throat to get the leader's attention, and with nothing but guilt and sincerity, he said, "I'm sorry. On behalf of everyone involved, I must tell you...there wasn't a day that went by that we didn't think about what happened, how we could have done better, how we could have done right. The error still haunts me to this day. I am terribly sorry."

Saxum swallowed a lump in his throat before he asked in a low voice, "You loved my mother?"

"Y-Yes, but it wasn't meant to be, as it turns out."

"Can you tell me more about her?"

That question took everyone by surprise. Shouldn't Saxum want to kill Maddock? Maddock instinctively shot Pellethia a nervous look, and the empress got the message.

She faced Saxum and said, "Saxum, I'm going to use my Authority on you to know what's really inside your head. This is not an attack. It's a precaution, alright?"

Saxum nodded in understanding. Pellethia's emerald eyes shone when she channeled her Authority and began her questioning, "Do you want to kill Maddock?"

"Yes and no."

“Elaborate on that.”

“Yes, because it was his mistake that killed my birth family. No, because...it was a mistake. My mother couldn't be seen, and my birth father was...sadly, not a good person...neither am I.” His head lowered for a brief moment before he continued, “I can relate to the thirst for revenge and be...blindsided by the rippling effect of that. I am...not optimistic about my future after what I've done, so with whatever time I have left, I want to know something about my mother. Anything.”

Pellethia wanted to help him, but after what he did...it was impossible. Her own people had been calling for justice ever since the first abduction took place. When word got out that the lost ones were found, there was relief only for a few hours. Now, the public wanted justice for those whose anatomies had been tampered with.

Saxum was right. His future was bleak. The law didn't take misunderstandings as a defense. No legal system did.

“Alright. We'll have that arranged.” That was all Pellethia felt sure of saying to Saxum.

After Saxum was escorted out by three vigils to have him sent to the dungeon, and Maddock tagged along to tell him everything about his mother outside the cell, the royal family members were left alone in the room.

Pellethia turned to Lucianne and asked sadly, “How would you have done what father did differently?”

Lucianne murmured, “I don't know if I would. After Maddock's unfortunate error, every other route available to Kosh seemed to have only led to either a dead end or a disaster.” She went over to give Pellethia a hug as she said, “Your father did everything he could, Pelly. He tried his best. None of us are perfect.”

Pellethia then asked everyone, “If we tried Saxum, and if he is sentenced to death...would we just be following in father's footsteps?”

Xandar gave that some thought before saying, “Not the way I see it. Kosh had no jurisdiction to order Heros's death because Rosalie's death was within the lycans' jurisdiction. In our case today, Saxum's army harmed both our

species, not just at Bordure but also in the hideout of the Forest of Oderem. We have reason to try him.”

Octavia added ominously, “Not just a reason, but a duty. We owe it to the lives that were lost. He can never be freed, not after what happened. Whatever he did, no matter how sympathetic his past is...amounts to attempted massacre, treason, amongst other things. Even if we did let him go...there’s no telling if he’ll survive whoever’s out there ready to k!ll him if they know who he is.”

Greg murmured, “He’s too deep in, crossed too many lines. He and the dead triplets practically led this whole thing that took this many of us to crack down. There’s no way to help him.”

Pellethia could only say, “Let’s hand this over to the justice system then.”

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0 5 minutes read

Those who were found and brought back from Neptune’s warehouse were now placed in a guarded apartment building near the castle. They were given food, clothing, medical checkups, and therapy if they wanted it. Toys had also been donated by civilians of the empire to the hybrid children.

Lucianne, Xandar, Christian and Annie made regular trips to visit the families with Pellethia, Octavia, Rafael and Amber, to see if the families needed anything that they could provide. Even Maddock and the other ministers came along a few times.

A few of the families began asking whether they could return to the lycan kingdom to visit families and show their parents their pups. Xandar and Lucianne immediately granted such requests and even gave the families a few dates where a jet would be sent to come pick them up.

The families began to trust the royal family and close aides as the visits frequented. But the widows and widowers were still closed-off. Most weren’t even ready to begin therapy. But the therapists assured Pellethia that, with time, those who lost their spouses would be ready to open up.

By far, the most difficult part of this whole thing was for the single parents to tell their children that one of their parents was never coming back because they were sacrificed in battle. Most cried, some screamed, and many became closed-off.

Michael, for instance, could sense that his mother zoned-out every now and then. He sometimes wondered if it was something he did. Regina did try her best to be there for Michael but seeing Chong's face in her mind just made her miss him so much that she wanted to cry all the time.

Ever since Michael was told about what happened to his father, he had only interacted with his mother, his mother's closest friend, Aisyah, and Lucianne. He was finding it difficult to open up like he used to, even smiling a lot less.

When Lucianne and Xandar were playing with him one day because he refused to join the other kids, he asked Lucianne with watered eyes, "Did papa die because he was bad?"

Lucianne immediately placed him on her lap and said, "No, Michael. Your papa was very brave. He stood for what was right."

"Then why did he die?"

"Because...doing what is right...isn't always safe. Your papa was not safe when he did the right thing."

Michael started sniffing when he choked out, "Why...didn't...anybody...save...him?"

The memory of Saxum's claws going through Chong's gut came to Lucianne's mind. The two were mind-linking before the sudden homicide. Lucianne could hack into mind-links. She should have hacked into theirs. If she knew where things were going, she could've emitted her Authority to make Chong step back, or restrain Saxum even if it were just a little. She had the power but didn't use it. She should've done more.

When Lucianne gently wiped away the boy's tears, she tried not to choke when she admitted, "We weren't fast enough, sweetheart. I'm sorry."

After some more sobs and sniffles, he looked up at Lucianne and asked, "Is mommy going to die?"

She frantically asked, "What? Why would you say that? Is your mommy okay?"

“She is not...talking much...like before.”

Lucianne gently stroked his hair as she explained, “Your mommy is grieving, Michael. She needs time. You need time, too.”

“What’s grieving?”

“It means...allowing yourself to be sad after someone close to you died.”

“Do you grieve, Lucy?” Michael asked innocently.

Lucianne nodded with a small smile, “I do.”

“So mommy and I will be sad forever?”

“No, sweetheart. It won’t be forever. You and mommy love your papa, and you will be sad that he’s no longer here, but he’s in here,” she placed her hand on his chest, and continued, “A part of your heart will always be connected to him. You will still miss him, as will mommy. Both of you still have each other, so there will still be sad days, but there will also be happy ones.”

Michael sniffled some more and leaned into Lucianne’s chest as she stroked his arm. After a moment, Michael looked at Xandar and asked, “Do you have a papa?”

Xandar smiled and answered gently, “I did, but he died a long time ago.”

“Oh...did you grieve?”

As Xandar gently stroked the boy’s hair, he replied, “I did.”

Michael then murmured, “Okay.”

Lucianne held Michael for an hour before he let Aisyah pull him away for lunch. Families like Michael’s were left alone when they wanted to be alone to grieve, and when they requested visiting the graves that the rulers claimed to have buried their loved ones at, their request was approved with provision of transportation.

At the graves, they wanted to hate the creatures who went against their loved ones in battle. But after learning about what Saxum and the other administrators planned and executed, it was difficult to see that their enemies were the true criminals.

Pellethia granted permission for grave visitations no matter how frequent they were, sending regular reminders that she was willing to provide flowers for them to bring along, if required.

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After Lucianne and Xandar left, Lucianne stayed silent in the car and on the jet. On the jet, Xandar held her close and planted a deep kiss on her forehead when he said, "What happened to Michael's father wasn't your fault, Lucy." He felt the guilt engulfing her when Michael asked why didn't anyone save Chong, and even he didn't have an answer.

Lucianne argued in a whisper, "I'm gifted with a power that I didn't even use. I could've hacked into their link and then pushed them apart. But I didn't."

He cupped her cheeks, looked intensely into her eyes and declared firmly, "You did everything you could, Lucy. You always have and you always will. That's who you are. Bordure was no different. Hacking into their link would not have guaranteed Chong's safety. If you did something before Saxum attacked Chong, it would look as if you were trying to start a fight between them. Even if you did manage to get Chong to step back...Saxum's claws would've still gone through him, sweetheart. They were standing very close, and Saxum was swift in that kill. He might not have managed to tear out his gut right away, but Chong's death was certain. Saxum wasn't letting anyone get in his way."

After wiping away her stray tear, he said, "The losses on their side are not your fault, my little freesia. Alright?"

She sniffled once and buried herself in his chest, making him hold her close. His grip instinctively tightened around her. Only after a few minutes did Lucianne manage a small smile and kiss his cheek before uttering, "Thank you, my love. I love you."

He pecked her on her lips before uttering with a soft smile, "Thank you, baby. I love you too."

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07 minutes read

The administrative hybrids and those who fought at Bordure weren't given as much freedom or luxury as those who weren't involved in executing the plan.

The administrators who were left after Chong's death were Saxum, Regina, Gerella, Rudolpho and Zepine.

Regina was placed on house arrest since she had Michael to care for. Gerella was confined to her apartment as well, escaping dungeons because she warned the empress and consort about the Bordure attack. The other three were kept in the dungeons until trial. Unlike the other prisoners, they weren't allowed to leave their cells for meals or walks. It was a safety precaution taken to avoid starting prison riots.

On a trip that Lucianne dreaded, Deputy Chief Laurent and Officer Laila escorted Kate when they boarded Xandar's jet with the queen to leave for the empire. Once they landed, Duica and Bernadette were there to take them to the dungeon where Rudolpho was being held.

In the car, Bernadette politely informed Lucianne, "We've already placed the one there according to your wishes, Your Highness. The other cell has just been gotten ready today. May I confirm that your prisoner has no dietary restrictions?"

Lucianne turned to Kate and unmuted her when she asked flatly, "Do you have dietary restrictions, Kate? Any allergies after consuming a particular food group?"

Kate was fuming all the way, not the least scared when she answered, "I'm allergic to your first-class hypocrisy, you AH—" Lucianne muted her again when Laurent's claws went right through her hands bound by silver cuffs.

Lucianne responded to Bernadette, "No, she doesn't have any dietary restrictions, Bernadette. Thank you."

"My pleasure, Your Highness. May I suggest extending the 72 hours to...a week?" Bernadette asked, taking offense in the way Kate spoke to Lucianne, even though Lucianne was not her queen.

Only Kate had no idea what the duration was about. The original plan to break Kate was to put her in a cell right in front of Rudolpho's, and send in Hilda to see what Rudolpho would do when he had to face both women at the same time. Hilda had already been warned about Rudolpho's betrayal, and she said yes to cooperating when her rage peaked. Hilda was free to leave if she wanted to, but Kate would remain where she was, forced to stay with the one she thought loved her and only her.

When the matter was discussed in the kingdom, Greg and Christian were visibly annoyed when Lucianne said that she would just keep Kate there for 24 hours. Xandar was as dissatisfied as his cousins were. He talked his wife into extending the period, so it became 72 hours, which still wasn't enough for Greg.

'That's the best you can do, cousin?' Greg linked Xandar in secret about persuading Lucianne.

Xandar's rhetorical reply was, 'Could you have done any better?'

'No, but 72 hours?! That's it?!'

'Think of it this way, Greg. Kate will also be charged for her crimes in the kingdom after she's kept with Rudolpho for 72 hours in the empire, so this isn't the end of her punishment.'

'The sentencing here better be heavy.'

'You know it will be. What she did was practically treason, and who knows what other petty crimes Dalloway and the others found. She'll most likely be behind bars for almost as long as Cummings and the others.'

'Fine.' Greg muttered and ended their link.

When Pellethia received Lucianne's link about the 72 hours, she immediately asked whether that length of time was even enough. Now in the car with the vigils, even Bernadette was suggesting extending it.

Lucianne wasn't going to give in at first, somehow feeling sorry for Kate that the man she trusted cheated on her with another woman. On the flip side, Kate was really pissing her off with her attitude, and she betrayed her pack along with everyone else who offered her a better life, so the queen told Bernadette, "I'll be submitting my request to the empress to have it extended to a month, plus two whips per day." She doubted her husband and cousin-in-laws would have a problem with the change.

Bernadette and Duica exchanged surprised glances before Bernadette replied with a gracious smile, "That's...wonderful, Your Highness. I'm sure the empress would be happy to hear from you about the matter."

After driving through the gates and walking through doors, exchanging smiles and greetings with the custodes on duty, they were led down a flight of cement stairs before the custode on duty, Anthony, turned on the lights. The moment Kate saw Rudolpho in a prison cell, she tried to free herself from Laurent and Laila but the lycan officers restrained her with ease.

Lucianne began, "Remember that little rendezvous I promised you, Kate?"

Kate's eyes widened in horror, and after glancing at Rudolpho, who made no move to stand even when he saw Kate enter, Kate shook her head violently and looked like she was finally pleading for mercy.

The vigils threw her in the cell facing Rudolpho's, and Lucianne continued, "It looks like I don't have to exert as much force as I thought. You see, Rudolpho already had someone when you two met, and their thirty-year partnership was never severed upon your arrival. So, I'm going to leave you here, and do you see that projector up there?" Lucianne pointed above her head, which even made Rudolpho look.

The queen continued, "That is going to project every photo in Rudolpho's phone of him and his partner on that white wall over there. So, you're going to be here for a whole month to see every photo and watch every video of them celebrating birthdays, going on nice dates, those kinds of things. And they will be played over and over and over again. There are A LOT of kissing and hugging, I should tell you. And uh...when you're not enjoying the...documentary, you'll be escorted out for two strokes of the whip daily. I'll come fetch you at the end of this 'honeymoon period' with your beloved for the kingdom's justice system to deal with you next, okay?"

Like she had a choice. Still, Kate's eyes showed that she doubted whatever Lucianne was saying. The queen asked, "You don't believe me, do you? Ask him yourself then."

After Kate was unmuted, she didn't speak right away. She looked at Rudolpho and was hoping that he would deny whatever she just heard, but he didn't even bother meeting her gaze. The lights near the white wall were turned off, and the projector started showing the photos like Lucianne just explained. Kate's eyes stuck there, and she was trying to tell herself that those were definitely photoshopped, that the fair-faced, ginger-haired woman was just some random model chosen from the millions of stock images on the internet.

Rudolpho watched it as well, missing the woman in the pictures and wondering where she was now.

Suddenly, a small, cool voice came behind Lucianne that asked, “Is that her, Your Highness?”

Before Lucianne responded, Rudolpho shot up from his bed, sprinted to the steel bars of the cell as he exclaimed, “Hilda! You came.”

Kate’s worst nightmare was presented before her. She saw the desperation in her lover’s eyes, the affection and relief in his voice that was shown to another woman – the woman in the photos. Kate and her wolf started piecing things together, replayed every moment they shared with Rudolpho, and her breathing got heavy.

Lucianne offered Hilda a polite smile and gave a light nod when she said, “Yes. That’s Kate. Would you like us to leave, Hilda?”

Although tired, Hilda managed to force a smile and say, “No, Your Highness. I...won’t be here long either.”

Upon hearing that, Rudolpho frantically said, “Hilda, please! I can explain. I had to do what I did. Saxum said we needed a back-up plan. We needed an insider. We...”

Hilda lost it. “YOU NEEDED AN INSIDER FROM TWO YEARS AGO WHEN SAXUM’S PLAN ONLY STARTED MONTHS AGO?! YOU HAD TO BE SEX-TEXTING AN INSIDER?!”

In a hushed tone, he pleaded, “Hilda, that was nothing. Please, at the end of the day, I’m only yours. At the end of the day, I only truly love you.”

Hilda’s eyes brimmed with hot, angry tears when she scoffed and replied, “At the end of the day, you only truly love yourself. No one does this to the people they love! You can rot in hell for all I care!”

Hilda turned and muttered in chopped voice to Lucianne, “Ex-cuse me, Your H-Highness.” She dashed out with her custode escort, not wanting to be seen crying in front of so many people. Rudolpho called out her name again and again, but Hilda never looked back.

Once the entrance door closed, Lucianne looked between Rudolpho and Kate when she said, “Well, that’s that. Since everyone is fully briefed about the existence of any past and present relationships...or lack thereof, both sides can now start afresh on honest grounds. I’ll leave you two here to...pursue your courtship from a distance.”

Everyone could hear the sarcasm in the queen’s voice that was devoid of empathy. Rudolpho was glaring daggers at the queen without knowing that Kate was scowling at him. When Lucianne turned to leave, she heard Kate scream in rage before taking the lamp on her nightstand and throwing it at the steel bars of her cell. The lamp broke into a few pieces, and Kate started throwing the broken pieces at Rudolpho as she continued screaming like a maniac. “YOU LIAR! YOU LIAR!”

Her aim wasn’t good, and Rudolpho managed to dodge most of her attacks as he himself sat on his bed thinking about Hilda, ignoring the crazy b!tch that was probably going to render him deaf by the time she left.

Outside, Lucianne followed the sound of sobs to Hilda, who was seated with a custode offering her a cup of water. Lucianne sat next to her in silence. When Hilda felt her presence, she looked up.

Lucianne asked, “Do you prefer to be alone right now, Hilda?”

Hilda nodded and muttered, “Yes, please.”

“Okay. If you need anything, let us know.”

Hilda nodded again, and Lucianne got up to leave. She linked Pellethia about her request when she was on the jet, and the empress was more than happy to see through with the revised plan. Pellethia even told Lucianne that she just got an update from the custodes, who said that Kate threw the prison lunch bowl at the projector but missed. She then started throwing her cutlery and food at Rudolpho as she screamed.

‘They’re telling me that she’s crying now, but the rage might return again soon.’

Lucianne agreed, ‘Yes, it will. It lingers for quite a while. Thank you for your help, Pelly.’

'You're welcome, Aunt Lucy. Kiss Reida for me, and send mine and Octavia's love to Uncle Xandar.'