

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 131 - Tips

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Toby visited Gerella twice a day, getting to know her and making sure that she had everything she needed to make the experience less tormenting. She constantly assured him that she was fine, and always looked forward to his visits.

He learned that her mother died giving birth to her, and her father subsequently passed on from the grief and heartbreak. He learned that she liked children and had a favorite – Isla. He also learned that she was fluent in proditor code. What was it used for? Help some of those who left the empire transmit messages to their families or close friends, if both sides were still on good terms even after the separation. The main translator was a proditor who stayed in the Forest of Oderem for a few years before sneaking back into the empire, living in one of the most remote parts under a new alias. His years as a proditor enabled him to read the code, and he made a good fortune out of the translating business when families and friends go to him to have the messages translated.

Evidently, not everyone entered the forest because they were trying to escape the authorities after committing a crime. Some entered as messengers, whose napes also bore the mark but the mark was only visible when they were in the forest. This convenience of communication was only available to vampires seeing that the forest was in their territory. No one thought to dig a tunnel leading to lycan or wolf territory solely for sending messages because until they started working with Klementine, the triplets and the others, no one knew where or how far to dig.

Gerella explained that many of the empire’s criminals didn’t actually stay in the forest. If their napes weren’t marked within six hours, they’d have to leave. If they didn’t, the forest would either spray foul scents to make them leave, or curse them or their families. They exited from a different part of the forest from where they entered, and would just disappear.

As Toby’s thumb stroked Gerella’s hand that was on his lap, he asked, “What if the same crook entered?”

She shrugged. “So long as they don’t stay the night, the forest wouldn’t care if they were inside for a few hours.”

“Huh. So it just hates law enforcement.”

“It did. But you mentioned that that’s not the case anymore, right?”

“Right.” Toby murmured simply as he gazed into her blue eyes before her head leaned against his shoulder.

Their mate bond was repaired and strengthened with each visit, and the sparks coursing through their bodies intensified with every touch and interaction between them. Toby never truly understood how even the fiercest creatures would completely melt and crumble upon their mate’s touch. But being with Gerella now, taking in her comforting scent, knowing that he was the only one who had the privilege of holding, smelling and touching her so intimately, he understood completely.

He pecked a light kiss on her hair before saying, “Thank you for what you did, Ella, for standing on our side.”

Her thumb traced his eyebrows when she said, “You don’t have to thank me. I shouldn’t have agreed with the plan from the very start.” After a moment, she continued, “I’m glad I met you halfway through. I needed to know the other side of the story. Everything became easier to see after that.”

He held her closer. “I’m glad I met you at that time too. Things would have been much more complicated if we ended up meeting in Bordure first.”

Gerella chuckled. “Well, I wouldn’t have killed you.”

“I wouldn’t have killed you either, Ella. But come on. That may have been the worst setting to find out that we’re mates. We deserve something peaceful.”

“Good thing we met at the beach then. Peaceful. Private. Romantic. Why were you there alone, if I may ask?”

A gentle wave of melancholy washed over Toby, and he began sharing about his younger days and the friends he had and lost. Gerella then understood why he was so protective of his existing friends. He had already lost so many that her heart ached for him.

She wrapped her arms around his chest and the heaviness in his chest miraculously lightened. He gave into his urge to hold her tightly in return, and when she pecked a kiss on his jawline, he felt like he owned the world.

When it was time for Toby to leave, he pecked the usual kiss on Gerella's lips before leaving the apartment. On his jet, he always replayed his time with Gerella and smiled to himself like an idiot. When it came to the topic of proditor code, his thoughts went to one creature he knew would be interested in the subject.

Toby spoke to Greg about it, and the duke expressed his interest in learning more about the code. He told the minister that he might just reach out to Gerella to get the details of this secret language after the vampire's legal system was done with her and when the rogue world in lycan and wolf territories had been 'properly cleansed'.

Greg's followers hunted down and caught Neptune, Klementine and Feva. Elvis and Sivle were just Klementine's less-known helpers, so finding them wasn't as difficult as the top four thought. These traitors didn't suffer from the same fate as the triplets, but the punishment that they were subjected to was an eternity in solitary confinement...after being tortured by Greg Claw first, of course.

Chief Dalloway even asked Greg if the black eyes, limping and deep wounds were already on his victims when he found them, to which the duke replied with a flat 'no' without offering any further explanation. Dalloway nodded in understanding, thanked him and got his people to run the rogues through the usual procedure.

Law enforcement on the vampires' side was busy running through their own procedures as well. After several weeks, a hearing was scheduled. There wasn't much of a fuss since all the administrative hybrids pleaded guilty.

The lightest sentencing was Gerella's, who was to be imprisoned for a mere twelve months, with the guarantee of early release for good behavior. Toby's wolf growled in protest but his human knew that was most likely the lowest sentencing that the judge could give. She wasn't just an accomplice for the most part of the plan. Gerella was one of those who approved suggestions and made decisions, so she was on equal standing as any other administrator.

The second lightest sentencing went to Regina, who was asked to pay a hefty fine of 200,000 monetæ (vampire currency) over the course of fifty years, along with serving 1,000 hours of community service. Regina didn't have any money yet, but once she was mentally and emotionally stable enough to work, the monthly deductions would be made from her salary. Should she default,

Michael would be taken by the adoption services in the name of providing the best form of care that a child is entitled to receive. This sounded like a threat to some, but it was merely a precaution to others.

Rudolpho, Zepine and any other creature at Bordure who didn't back down from the plan down to the final battle, were sentenced to 300 years behind bars. Visitations would only be allowed after the one-century mark, provided that they had been on good behavior for those 100 years.

Saxum's sentencing was ten whips a day for eighteen months before he would be terminated by slow decapitation. He was also not granted visitation rights, so even Maddock wouldn't be allowed to see him anymore.

As for the lycans and werewolves who lived in the Forest of Oderem without the empire's approval, they were fined 5,000 monetæ each, to be paid over the course of five years. Although deportation would normally follow, the court decided against it seeing that there were many children to single lycan or werewolf parents. Deporting their parents would cause the children further distress on top of the deaths at Bordure. The court offered the parents a three-month grace period, and in these three months, the families must decide whether to register as a citizen of the empire, or renew their registrations in the kingdom and registering their children there as well. If they failed to comply, separation and deportation would follow.

Most chose to stay in the empire while a handful chose to leave. Hale, as the Minister of Welfare, got an accommodation in the kingdom ready to house these newcomers on a temporary basis. They were informed that they were expected to find a job and learn to sustain themselves and their children after a month of grieving, otherwise, like Regina, their children would be taken by the authorities to provide better care than the one a parent could offer.

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When Toby visited Gerella in prison for the first time, his leg fidgetted as he prayed that he wouldn't see that she had been battered or anything like that. The empress and consort assured him many times that Gerella was going to be safe, and that the prison guards always had things under control so violence and bullying seldom happened behind those walls.

He was waiting for her in the private visitation room for two painful minutes before Gerella entered with the policewoman, who then took off the keratin

and silver cuffs that bound her wrists while reminding her about the usual procedure and the two hours that she was allowed. Gerella was dressed in the teal green uniform that everyone else wore, her hair up in a ponytail, and Toby sighed in relief that she still looked perfect.

Gerella's brows arched in confusion when she took her seat in front of him and skipped over the usual 'hi' or 'hey' by asking, "You think I was going to refuse meeting you?"

He saw the humor swimming in those gorgeous eyes, and his hands reflexively reached out to hold her fingers, his thumb stroking the back of her hand when he confessed in a distressed whisper, "I was just worried. I wasn't sure if you were safe in here."

Gerella carefully slid her fingers between his when she uttered with a smile, "I am. We all are. They're really strict about not touching another inmate here, especially if voices start to raise."

"Oh no." Toby muttered in dismay at the last part.

"It's a good thing, Toby."

"Were they raised at you?"

With a gentle shake of her head, she replied, "No."

"Okay." He sighed in relief. "It's just twelve months. Six months if we get lucky." As hard as Toby was trying to be here for his mate, his demeanor showed that he was assuring himself more than he was trying to comfort her when he said that. He and his wolf were more worried about their mate's situation than Gerella was herself. Despite being the one in custody, she seemed as calm as clear skies.

Gerella gave his hand a gentle squeeze when she met his eyes and spoke in an affectionate whisper, "Hey," the worry in his eyes melted away with the tranquil blue orbs that held him captive, and Gerella continued, "We're going to be okay. Thank you for coming to see me."

Toby scoffed as his mood improved by the sound of her voice and the way she spoke to him. With a wide smile, he confessed, "Ella, don't thank me for

this. I never want to NOT see you. If possible, I want to stay with you in there until they let you out.”

Gerella felt her heart swell at his declaration, yet she still chose to state the obvious, “Inmates are separated by gender, Toby. We won’t see each other or be together even if you were in there. You’d be in the other block.”

Toby gr0aned and complained, “Can’t you let a guy dream for once, Ella?”

Ella chuckled. “This might be the first time I’m hearing about a dream that curtails liberty.”

“When my mate is in prison, I feel as trapped as she is. It might feel a little more liberating if I could see her more than twice a day, or hold her longer than a few seconds each time.” Toby felt his wolf nodding in agreement.

His animal had really been an animal lately. After the judge sentenced Gerella and the others, his wolf kept asking its human to find ways to break into prison to see their mate, pestering him to ask Gerella which cell was she in so that it could save time sniffing her out. It even encouraged Toby to ask for Greg’s help so that they wouldn’t get caught. As tempting as that was, Toby decided against it. There was no telling what would happen if he did get caught, especially if the prison guards found his scent in corridors or parts of the prison where he shouldn’t have been in.

A tinge of pink slowly appeared on Gerella’s cheeks at how smoothly Toby said what he did, the way he looked at her when he said it. There was no hesitation, no need to think. It was like he just...knew that that was what he truly wanted. Being an administrator, Gerella had always been seen and heard, and knew what it was like to feel important.

But Toby seemed to have taken it on a whole new level, or a different spectrum altogether. He didn’t just see and hear her. In his visits and when they spent time together, she could tell that he wanted to see things that she wasn’t showing, hear things that she wasn’t saying. He didn’t just make her feel important, he made her feel like a special puzzle that he was more than happy to solve.

“What have you been up to lately?” He asked gently, bringing her out of her thoughts.

“Uh...making friends, mostly.” A thought came to her, and her eyes sparkled in joy when she shared enthusiastically, “I reconnected with a few of those forest messengers. Most of them are here for petty theft. They recognized me and welcomed me into their circle. We’re getting along very well. What was interesting to me though was that they said they’ve been in prison before, like it wasn’t a big deal. Some have been in and out for more than ten times. Can you believe it, Toby? They know these walls and hallways like it was their other home or something.”

Toby was definitely not expecting to hear that. He blinked before responding, “As unexpected as that was, it’s definitely good news. At least you have company, but these messengers...they can’t read the codes, right?”

She nodded when she said, “That’s right,” and added with a smile, “They’ve been complaining a lot lately, saying that one of their sources of income has been depleted now that none of us live there anymore. They like me, but...they hate you.”

“Wait, what?” Toby’s eyes bulged wide in disbelief.

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Gerella’s smile grew in cheekiness when she explained, “They think it’s the authorities’ fault that we left the hideout. Since you’re part of the authorities, they hate you.”

Toby argued in a whisper, “Ella, that’s not fair. The vigils went in first. I’m NOT a vigil. Hate on them. And besides, you guys left BEFORE any of us saw any of you.”

She replied with a playful smile, “I know.”

“Didn’t you tell them?” Toby asked in dismay.

“Not at first. I do like to listen to everything someone says before I say anything. It gives me a good picture of what they know and where they stand in things.”

“Baby, you didn’t defend me?”

Gerella's focus was broken by the way Toby called her. He never called her 'baby' before this day. That word felt like Toby was wrapping her in his arms even though they were seated across each other. The way they were both leaning across the small table showed their desperation to do just that – to hold each other in a long embrace, but they always saved this part for when Toby had to leave.

"Ella, hey, you okay?" Toby gave her hands a gentle squeeze when she said nothing in her few moments of shock.

She blinked a few times before she said, "Yes, I'm...alright. For the record, I did defend you, Toby. I told them how we were the ones who were wrong, and that you're a really good person."

"And?" Toby's eyes widened in anticipation.

"They hate you less than they hate Saxum now, but I think they have a propensity to hate law enforcement in general."

"Great." Toby murmured in dissatisfaction.

She narrowed her eyes in playful suspicion when she said, "I didn't know you care so much about what inmates think of you, Toby."

He replied simply, "I didn't, until some of them turned out to be your friends."

"I'm sure they'll warm up to you once they get to meet you. They have a soft spot for good-looking guys."

The ears of Toby's animal perked up, and Toby's own eyes shone when he tightened his grip on her hands as he asked in a whisper, "You think I'm good-looking?"

Gerella didn't mask her surprise and annoyance by that question. "Did you seriously just ask that, Toby? You know, when you told me that your last attempt at intimate love was in your late teens, I didn't believe you. When you brought me to meet the queen, and I saw what she looked like, it was very hard to believe that you two had only ever been best friends. You two look so close, and you're both very attractive."

Frantically, he said, “You do know I wasn’t lying, don’t you? I’ve never lied to you about anything. Ella, Lucy is really just my best friend. We have no history. We never saw each other like that. Ever.”

Gerella smiled warmly when she uttered, “I know. The way the two of you interact and speak to each other made me sure of that. She seems nice.”

Toby had the urge to specify, “Only when she’s not fighting.”

Gerella shrugged and said, “That’s fair. We hear things about her here in prison, too. Even the forest messengers are a little scared of her, despite never meeting her. When they asked if I met her, and I said yes, they asked if the queen tortured me before I was thrown in here. Many of them didn’t believe me when I said she never hurt me. No one believed me when I said that she was nice. They think I was given some drug or potion to make me forget what was done to me, or that I have a threat hanging over my head if I spoke ill of her.”

Toby weighed up that fact, and a mischievous smile slowly graced his features when he said, “I think I have a way to befriend your messenger friends, Ella. We all love you, and we’re all scared of Lucy! We have those things in common. Isn’t it great?!”

Her eyebrows furrowed when she asked, “Should you even be doing that to your best friend?”

Toby waved his hand like it was no big deal. “We’ve teased Lucy about her ferocity many times over the years. She’s cool with it, even getting back at us sometimes. Her brother does it too, but...I think I’m the worst one.”

Gerella chuckled again, and she stroked the back of his hand when she prompted, “So what have you been up to?”

“Besides thinking about you? Mostly the usual: checking on the Gammas and warriors, training, communicating with the vampires about decipio practice sessions for the wolf packs, reading stuff for the next meeting, those kinds of things.”

Gerella remembered Toby mentioning how the government wanted to ‘expand’ a wolf and lycan’s training to include decipio practice sessions, and there were several skeptical packs that weren’t yet onboard with the idea, so she carefully asked, “How are they taking it? The decipio practice?”

“Some...still aren't very open to the idea yet, but...the upside of this is that all the strongest packs have signed up, and the majority of the other packs are saying yes to it. The problem is just those who...have a preconception that the vampires have some evil plan for wanting to help.”

“That's a little sad.”

“Or stupid.”

“Maybe they just need time.”

“I am one hundred percent with you on that, Ella. With time, these birdbrains will eventually die off, and we'll be safe from their stupidity.”

Gerella's eyes narrowed in irritation, “That wasn't what I meant, Toby.”

Toby chuckled and stroked her hands to soothe her. “I know, Ella. I know. And you're right. They just need time to warm up to the idea. Once they see other packs doing it with no issues, they'll get onboard.”

When the timer went off, a thread of melancholy weaved itself into the happy atmosphere. They looked at the annoying timer sadly like they always did when the visit had to come to an end, and both got out of their seats before Toby pulled Gerella into his chest. He hooked his chin above her head as they held each other in a tight embrace. Toby took in her scent, breathing deeply into his lungs, miraculously hoping that the smell of his mate would be stored there until the next time they saw each other again.

Toby parted their bodies only to look into her sad, blue eyes. His hand reached for the back of her head before pulling her into a deep kiss. Gerella's eyes fluttered closed as she indulged in the feeling of his warm lips against hers. The sparks that coursed through her body with each brush made her feel protected, desired and loved.

When the guard tapped on the metal door twice, Toby reluctantly pulled away. He pressed a kiss on her forehead and uttered, “I'll see you in the evening, okay?”

Gerella nodded and managed a smile. After giving his hands another squeeze, she let them go and walked towards the guard at the door, who put the cuffs back on before opening the door to let her back out. She briefly turned back to see Toby one more time before disappearing from his view.

Toby left the prison and boarded his jet. After replaying his time with Gerella, he kept her at the back of his mind while scrolling through the morning's news.

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Xandar was in bed scrolling through his phone when he read the news from the empire. Many were awed and even touched by the level of commitment that the kingdom offered to their Imperial Majesties, vigils and governing body during the cooperation.

They were grateful to Greg because he tracked down the triplets and brought back the abducted vampires before killing the scientists and destroying their lab. When he was reported to be 'the only royal family member who is, at present, single', some women from the empire even boldly expressed their interest to 'meet' the duke.

Xandar took a screenshot of that part of the article and sent it to Greg, and he didn't expect the reply that came seconds later with only four words, "I hate you, cousin" along with the middle-finger emoji. Xandar chuckled to himself as he continued reading.

Journalists quoted some civilians saying how much they were looking forward to collaborating with lycans and wolves, be it in business, education or environmental issues.

In recent weeks, Lucianne gained popularity in the vampire community for how skillful and powerful she was reported to be during the battle, and how Pellethia credited Lucianne for helping her find the confidence and self-belief to unlock the Empress's Authority. They also liked the fact that Lucianne spent time with the hybrid children even though they weren't housed in her kingdom. It was not a short trip, but she and her husband visited frequently despite that.

Xandar, on the other hand, became popular when the vampires were told that the Lycan King broke and tore off Saxum's limbs during the battle. They mentioned liking Xandar visiting the hybrids as well, but his ferocity was the more favored element. They loved that he was seen to torture the proditors by breaking their limbs or scratching their bodies before ultimately killing them.

The king himself began wondering if torturing and killing another creature, especially a vampire, was even an appropriate way to gain popularity and earn acceptance among the other vampires. The war with them two centuries

ago started with violence and wilful lack of consideration, and no one was celebrating then.

A sleepy and naked Lucianne felt his contemplation through their bond, and she scooped into him when she murmured with closed eyes, "Darling, what is it?"

His lilac eyes snapped to her, and his contemplation melted into blissful happiness as he admired his beautiful flower when her arm slid across his hard chest. After a sweet peck on her hair, his thumb drew circles on her smooth, bare shoulder as he explained what he had been reading, and concluded with his own thoughts, "I never doubted that they would love you. I knew that, being the one of lycan descent, I'd be the one that they would have a hard time accepting. But when I dreamt of fixing our kingdom's relationship with the majority of the empire's civilians, impressing them through violence was not what I had in mind."

Lucianne chuckled lightly when she pushed herself up to kiss the corner of his lips and muttered, "Darling, you are amazingly frightening and incredibly sexy when you're inhumane. It's okay to be violent sometimes."

"Hm, is that so, my love?" The way she repeated the words he said to her not too long ago turned him on, and the delicious view of his mate's perfect body only made him more aroused than he already was. After placing his phone on the nightstand, he flipped her body over before hovering above her. The previous night was amazing, and both were ecstatic and satisfied after the session but when they woke up this morning, they realized that they wanted more. They needed more.

Xandar began kissing Lucianne's neck before moving down to her breasts, where he licked her nipples, and his hand traced her smooth skin from her breast to her waist, then her butt. Her small hands ran along his broad shoulders, neck and moved up to his thick hair. When Xandar headed north to suck on her neck, he linked her seductively, 'Oh, you are a Goddess-given masterpiece, my love.'

"Ohh..." she moaned softly as his fingers played with the moisture that her lower body was producing.

His mouth went further up before stopping by her ear, where he whispered, "Moan louder, My Queen."

His touch made her moist but his deep, alluring voice made her wet. Xandar knew this too, and he moved south before his tongue began toying with her wet folds, making her gasp and moan louder than she did before. He loved the way her body responded to his touch, and the sounds that came along with that was the most effective way to get his tool hardened. His tongue and fingers sped up when he could feel she was close. When she screamed and her body arched, Xandar drank and lapped up every last drop as her chest rose and fell.

He moved up to her neck again, teasing her mark by pecking kisses all around it. Lucianne whimpered as his tool teased the part of her that ached for him to fill the emptiness. Xandar felt her burning urge, and decided to put them out of their misery, so he entered her and began pumping. Xandar went rougher with her this time, slamming with each thrust as Lucianne's moans and whimpers of pleasure continued driving him and his animal insane.

When she screamed and her core tightened around him, the product of his own orgasm shot into her. He pressed their bodies together as they took heavy breaths. After a moment, he gave her butt a surprise squeeze to elicit her gasp and cute moan before he whispered, "Does this mean you love me when I'm rough and violent, baby?"

When their eyes locked, Lucianne reached for his cheek as she said in a gentle whisper, "Xandar, I love you when you're a lot of things, not just when you're rough and violent. I love you when you're soft and vulnerable, too. Your violence is...more of a form of protectiveness in my eyes. I love that you're fiercely protective of our people. I also love that you only resort to violence if there is no other way to keep the ones under your care safe."

Her thumb stroked his eyebrows when she continued softer, "Apart from your protectiveness, I love that, no matter how busy you are, you always make time for the ones who matter most to you like Christian and Annie, and now me and Reida. I love the way you light up when you talk about history or anything else you love. I love the contemplative look in your eyes when you're thinking through a problem. I love that, no matter how hard or tedious it is to do things the right way, you never resort to shortcuts if it isn't in the kingdom's best interest to do so. And those are just the main ones. Darling, there are so many things to love about you. It's not just your ability to be rough and violent."

Xandar's eyes glistened in joyful tears. He and his animal were touched beyond words, and his animal pushed forward for a full minute just to lean its nose and forehead against his mate's as it cooed aloud to convey its love for her. When his human regained control, he trapped her lips in a deep kiss before he whispered, "I love you so, so much, Lucy."

"I love you too, Xandar. So much."

After gently nudging her nose, he urged softly, "Tell me you know that I love you, baby."

She held his cheek when she declared, "I know. I love you, too."

After a quick kiss on his lips, she tried to push him away but he held her in place as he asked, "And where do you think you're going, my little freesia? Reid's fine."

The deep affection that was swimming in those black-and-lilac eyes just seconds ago was now replaced with a look of annoyance when she noted the obvious, "If I remember correctly, My King, we agreed to bring Iridessa's proposal to the ministers at nine o'clock today. It's already eight. We have to get ready."

Xandar groaned and imprisoned her body once more as he murmured, "We could cancel the meeting," he began kneading her breast and playing with her nipple when he added, "And say that something urgent came up."

"Like what? Your inability to get out of bed?"

He smirked when he suggested, "Or my inability to get out of my wife. That could work, too."

When Lucianne started pulling herself out of his hold, she murmured, "Indecent beast."

Xandar immediately pressed her against the pillows of the headrest and peered into her eyes with a challenging gaze, which prompted her to give in and say, "MY indecent beast."

"Mm." His mouth met hers to search for her tongue, and when he finally let her go, he promised, "Always and forever, Lucy."

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In the meeting room, everyone brought their notes along with their own copies of Iridessa's theses as they took their places around the table. Toby was walking to his own seat when he muttered a complaint as he walked past Lucianne, "I swear, I've never seen that many words in a single document in my entire life."

Lucianne merely scoffed softly in amusement, whereas Xandar saw the need to respond, "It's a thesis with research taken from all species, Toby."

"Wrong. It's TWO theses, Xandar."

Lucianne covered her mouth to swallow the chuckles when Xandar continued, "Exactly, so what did you expect?"

Shamelessly, Toby declared, "I expected more graphs and charts, preferably with color."

Weaver exclaimed, "That was exactly what I said!"

When Weaver and Toby high-fived, Yarrington shook his head with an amused smile as he exchanged a knowing look with the queen.

When everyone arrived, they started the meeting. Toby came up with the simplest way to steer the discussion. "I work better with short words and notes, so from whatever I understand from this encyclopedia, it's essentially three parts of support that we can be expected to provide: personal, professional and environmental.

Personal support, as the theses noted, was aimed at helping inmates understand and make peace with the whys. Why was the crime committed? Why did it happen to them? After this, it would be emphasized that they may not have known better then, but they did know better after the incident.

For Ivory, the crime was an unfortunate mistake. The consequence of remembering that he accidentally killed his colleague would stay with him longer than his sentencing. He wasn't careful then, but he undoubtedly became more careful after that. Hailey's child-swallowing-crayons scenario was another one which fitted here.

For Desmond, the crime was intentional fraud but in one of their chats without Greg being present, Desmond confessed to Lucianne that his own father had been cheated of sixty percent of his retirement fund that was supposed to help he and his sister get into college. The fund was monitored by a third-party company which was headed by the employer's brother, hence Desmond's anger and resentment towards abusive employers. Filing a lawsuit to claim the money took another thirty percent of the fund. Although Desmond's father and many others won on paper, the company filed for insolvency and the sum stolen couldn't be restored.

The support that the government aimed to provide ways to help inmates understand that what they did was not entirely their fault, like Ivory and Hailey; and it sought to open the minds of those like Desmond, who would be given suggestions on how to further their cause in a legal manner.

Alissa's type of circumstance was very delicate because it involved the mate-bond, betrayal and loss, which would inevitably entail strong and justified emotions of infuriation, resentment and devastation. Personal support would be more frequent for inmates like her, to encourage them to get better and ensure them that they won't be alone when they assimilated themselves into society once again.

At the end of discussion for the first segment, it was agreed that therapy should be provided to every inmate at least thirty minutes a week. Annie and Hale were the ones in charge of seeing this through. They were to reach out to organizations and professionals to collaborate with the government and to ensure that only when inmates are mentally, emotionally and psychologically stable would they be released from prison. If they didn't reach this threshold even after completing their sentence, therapy would continue, which would be scheduled by parole officers at the convenience of ex-inmates.

As an incentive to encourage related professionals and organizations to help, the government decided to offer a ten percent bonus for a therapist's time at every eleventh inmate if the first ten had successfully reached the threshold.

Vanessa said, "How many professionals would have to certify that an inmate has reached the clinical threshold is now the question. I'm voting on three."

Some voted five, others two. But the majority swung towards three, so three it was.

Xandar called for a short break, which was when Christian heaved an exhausted sigh and uttered, "One down."

Toby slumped into his seat to get a quick shuteye when he continued for the duke, "Two to go."

Christian, Annie along with some ministers left the room to just walk around or get some air during the break. Xandar himself placed Lucianne on his lap and guided her to lean into his chest as he closed his eyes and buried his nose in her hair to get his preferred type of fresh air. Lucianne leaned into him to let the sparks soothe her being and replenish her energy.

Everyone came back a little fresher after the fifteen-minute break, and got on to the next item: supporting inmates and recently-released ex-inmates professionally.

Inmates should be required to take up a class that would teach them some kind of skill that would give them a competitive advantage when they entered or re-entered the workforce. Yarrington and Benedict were in charge of this segment since they were already working closely with teachers, mentors, lecturers and professors at every level of education. The point was to make sure that they could do something to feed themselves when their imprisonment term was over.

Yarrington and Benedict pointed out that the issue of finding employers who wanted to take ex-inmates was of concern, and that was where Christian came in. Since he inherited companies from various sectors, he'd be able to absorb a significant number of ex-inmates.

Xandar and Lucianne disclosed that they were mandating the removal of the section of job application forms which asked whether the applicant was an ex-inmate, and to declare a company discriminatory if it was found that this topic had been raised during an interview. Companies which were found to be discriminatory would be fined and their taxes increased.

The king and queen had also pledged to meet housekeeping agencies, food and beverage owners and the like to offer ex-inmates employment opportunities should they still fail to find a job. Zelena and Tate offered to do the same in wolf territory to speed up the process. The Minister of Justice, Pamela, even offered to propose recruiting them as clerks, runners and timekeepers in the next meeting with the judiciary.

“That should suffice for now.” Yarrington said. Everyone looked to their king, waiting for a signal for a break.

Xandar was already lifting Lucianne off her seat while she was still running through her notes. He placed her on his lap when he told the rest, “Yup, go ahead. Fifteen.”

Lucianne continued scrutinizing the points when most of them went for a breather. The moment Xandar felt the throb in her head, he took away her notebook, placed it back on the table and pressed her into his chest. Lucianne was too drained to protest so she simply closed her eyes and inhaled his scent, concentrating on his heartbeat.

Round three: environmental support

Weaver agreed with Iridessa’s suggestion that public housing should prioritize ex-inmates instead of excluding their eligibility just because of their criminal record. The government should subsidize the first two months of rent, and provide a small congratulatory payment if the ex-inmates eventually manage to move out. The earlier they move out, the higher the reward.

In the ‘miscellaneous’ side of things, the theses emphasized the need to raise public awareness about how any creature was capable of changing for the better, and how acceptance would only benefit society, the economy and harmony in the long run. There should be media coverage, talks and seminars to educate the general public about the subject. The government unanimously agreed that they wanted Iridessa to lead this initiative, and Lucianne offered to speak to the woman herself.

When everything was concluded by lunch hour, Weaver was the first to get up and stretched out his body when he said casually, “How I love a meeting without Cummings, Whitlaw and the other morons.”

That was probably the fifteenth time Weaver said that after a meeting was concluded. Still, those who went through the years of ordeal of working with those time-wasting, anti-change and solution-repelling ex-ministers could never get tired of hearing Weaver’s line.

Yarrington merely packed his things as he entertained his mate for the fifteenth time, “I’m sure you do, my dear.”

Lucianne was looking at them with an ‘aw, you guys are so cute’ look, like she always did after Yarrington responded to Weaver’s remark, so the education minister met the queen’s gaze with a smile and said, “We’ll see you later, My Queen, My King.”

“See you.” Lucianne’s significantly softer and weaker voice surprised even herself.

Her husband pulled her out of her seat and started speedily packing her notes as he said, “Let’s get you something to eat before we meet Pelly and Octavia. You’ll get a shuteye in the car and some sleep on the jet.” A quick kiss on her forehead before he slid his hand into hers and uttered, “Come,” before leading her out.

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After lunch, Lucianne and Xandar met with the vampire rulers to discuss bringing back the Secret Service. They have been watching Greg and his followers. Not only did they conclude that none of them went out of line, they agreed that none of them went anywhere near that line. The initiatives they took were highly commendable; their commitment in the cooperation was unwavering; and their loyalty outshone their pasts, no matter how dark they were painted to be.

Octavia even mentioned that it didn’t feel like they were doing what they did to be pardoned. The royal mavericks helped because they wanted to help. Margaret’s followers were more split – about two-thirds helped because, like the royal mavericks, they grew to like working with others beyond their own. But the remaining one-third were just there for the pardon, excluding the traitors, Kate and Howard, of course.

As a precaution for the sake of the kingdom and empire, Lucianne suggested that all rulers be given a regular update on the ins and outs of the Service for the first ten years. If all went well, then less frequent updates would suffice. The mavericks would have discretion as to how they operated, but the rulers had the power to stop assignments or shut down the Service altogether if such a time ever came.

Xandar was relieved that Lucianne brought this up the previous day when they were discussing the matter between themselves. At present, Lucianne

didn't want to give Greg unrestrained power and authority, but she didn't do it for her husband.

As much as she personally trusted Greg now, she couldn't deny that, as queen, she had a duty to make sure that precautionary measures were taken for the sake of the other civilians in the kingdom. If the mavericks ever went too far, the rulers would be able to terminate any task and hunt down the ones involved. She definitely hoped that this would never happen, but if it does, they would know what to do.

When the decision was finalized, Pellethia noted the obvious, "So, the only question that remains now is DOES the duke want to lead something like this. They've been free for so many years of their lives. What we want as precautions for our people would stifle the mavericks' movement to quite an extent."

Xandar argued, "We're not stifling their movement. We just want to be kept in the loop. They would finally be safe to move around the kingdom without needing to hide their faces or mask their scents everytime someone from law enforcement is in their proximity. The need for updates isn't that bad, but it might involve...a level of tediousness that my cousin is rather allergic to."

Octavia disagreed. "His Grace may not like procedures the way we uphold them, Xandar, but he doesn't hate being tedious, I find. In the tasks that interest him, he strives for perfection as much as we do. Look at the way he brought back our people and dealt with the scientists."

Lucianne stroked the back of Xandar's hand and murmured, "He also had to be tedious in his security measures for him and his followers to live right under our noses for so long."

"Under mine and Christian's noses." Xandar muttered before taking another sip of his drink.

When it was time to leave to visit the hybrids, they left the castle and headed for their destination. Weaver and Yarrington arrived shortly after meeting with the ministers of education and environment on the vampire's side, and they checked up on the families and with the professionals looking after them before taking their leave.

Lucianne and Xandar went home to get Reida from Mrs Parker before going to the Den to meet Greg. The moment they stepped into the lounge, Greg took a quick glance at their exhausted postures and tired eyes before asking, "Long day, you two?"

Lucianne, who was holding Reida, replied, "Two meetings. One hybrid visit. It gets busy like this sometimes. We're fine, really."

"Uh-huh." Greg replied, not at all convinced so he threw his cousin a doubtful look.

Xandar explained, "Yes, she's drained. This is our last stop for the day. Once we're done here, she'll be fine."

"That was more believable." Greg uttered before meeting the princess's large eyes looking straight at him, and while Lucianne was telling Xandar something about needing to give the hybrids and the others more clothes, the baby holding her teddy gave her uncle a little wave as she mouthed 'fvck'.

Greg's smile had never been broader as he briefly waved back, utterly impressed at how the little girl got around her mother's fierce, repeated reminder of not using that very word.

His sights were only torn off his niece when Lucianne prompted, "Well, shall we, Greg?"

"Of course. Right this way, My Queen."

He led them to a small discussion room with a round table and three chairs. After Lucianne took a seat and placed her daughter on her lap, she began, "We spoke to the vampire rulers, and we've come to an agreement that we want to bring back the Secret Service, but only if you want to lead the initiative."

Greg's brows furrowed, and his entire posture froze for two whole seconds before he blinked and asked, "Pardon me, My Queen, but...what?" He thought she came to ask for a favor and was cracking his head the whole day wondering whether there were any loose ends that weren't properly tied up.

Lucianne registered his shock and clarified her question, "Would you like to lead a legally-recognized body where you have full discretion of its operations and network, but would have to submit biweekly reports on any venture that

you'll be sending your people on? The difference between what you've been doing all this time and what we're currently offering you is that your followers would no longer have to hide in the shadows or mask their scents. Those employed by your supplier and any other individual who want a second chance in the kingdom have the option of assimilating into society again as well. If they wish to continue in the...rogue line of work, it must be in the service of the kingdom, meaning it's to monitor suspects, sniff out threats or anything like that. If they insist on pursuing intentions that harm the kingdom, we must hunt them down and run them through our legal system."

Greg muttered to himself, "Hm. Didn't think they'd get a pass, too. They didn't even do anything."

"They got you your supplies, didn't they? Those that allowed your mavericks to earn some money before our cooperation?" Lucianne asked.

"Yes." Greg uttered in defeat.

Lucianne continued, "And, Greg, there is also the...dreaded condition that we are to be kept informed about what's going on."

Greg immediately said, "That's not a dreaded condition, My Queen. It's a rational requirement. I impose the same thing on every rogue and maverick living in the shadows of the kingdom."

Lucianne was surprised to hear that, but went on nonetheless, "I should also mention that should we ever see the need to dissolve the Service, we retain the power to do so, in which case, members would be expected to go their separate ways and if any...questionable members are involved, we will hunt them down and run them through the law."

Xandar added, "Or, if the situation is severe, we'll use our royal prerogative to deal with them as we deem fit."

Greg uttered, "It's funny how you almost never use that, cousin. Uncle Lucas waved that thing so many times like it was a flag."

"I'm not him." Xandar noted.

"Clearly. Anyway, I'm interested in hearing the dissenting opinion of this idea." Greg said with a smirk shot at Xandar before his attention returned to Lucianne.

Her delicate brows furrowed when she said, "There was no dissenting opinion, Greg. This is a unanimous agreement."

Greg looked back at his cousin in disbelief when he asked, "Really?"

Xandar managed a diplomatic smile and replied, "Really. I'm not going to lie, Greg. I hated the idea of us working together..."

"The feeling's mutual." Greg muttered.

Xandar let out a brief, amused scoff before he continued, "Before we met your followers, I...expected some of them to stray and turn against us. Even when we started cooperating, I expected you to...do things that you weren't supposed to do, both with regards to the cooperation and to me personally."

Greg didn't even bat an eye when he spoke crudely, "Cousin, as much as I hate you less than I did before, it doesn't erase the fact that whatever I did wasn't for you personally."

At that point, Lucianne started whispering affectionately to Reida at a volume that both cousins could hear, "Did you hear that, Reida? Uncle Greg hates daddy less now, and daddy is giving Uncle Greg a chance. Isn't that great? You're going to grow up with three uncles in our big, happy, and slightly scary family."

Reida chuckled even though she had no idea what her mother just said. Their daughter's laughter softened Xandar's heart, and whatever Lucianne just said touched Greg's soul.

Greg tore his eyes away from Reida before turning to his cousin and said, "Anyway, it wasn't as bad working with you and Blackfur. As for the offer for leading the Secret Service, thank you for your support." Greg tried not to show how weird it felt to convey thanks to the very creature he'd spent so long hating.

Xandar was caught by surprise as well. When he snapped out of it, he asked, "So, you'll do it?"

"Yes, why wouldn't I?"

Xandar noted the obvious, "Because you hate law and the authorities?"

Greg retorted, "That was before I found out those under you two now had more brains and speed than those under Uncle Lucas and Vera. The present authorities are nowhere near perfect yet, but they are not a lost cause, unlike their predecessors. As for why I used to hate them...honestly, can you blame me? And I'm not just talking about speed and intelligence here, cousin. Even with all those procedures and so-called precautions in place, they couldn't even do things right. I mean, just look what the ones from the past did to them." His hand gestured at the door leading outside, where his followers were.

Xandar got the point. "I admit, we should have done more for those under your care. We are doing more now. Prisoner reentry was the only topic of discussion in government headquarters this morning."

Lucianne added, "It's not right that they've been overlooked and neglected, Greg. We're doing whatever we can to fix this now. We really do admire what you did for them when no one else was there to help. It certainly explains your scent."

"My scent?" Greg asked, feeling somewhat small when he could tell that even Xandar understood what she was saying.

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0 7 minutes read

Lucianne explained to Greg the same way she explained to Xandar the previous night, "Yes, Greg. Your scent. Ever since you've disclosed housing 98 rogues, none of us could fathom how you never smelled like a rogue. When you confessed to being the one leading the rogue world, the issue of why your natural scent was preserved became even more perplexing. I thought you used scent sprays at first, but you didn't always have those on hand even when you were in prison, so that couldn't be it. The only logical explanation is that you were never a rogue."

"O...kay?" Greg tried to keep up before he said, "That's probably because no matter what I do, I'm still of royal lineage, My Queen."

Xandar countered, "That can't be it, Greg. In the past, any king or queen who had been dethroned and thrown to the rogues with their loyal followers did not retain their natural scent. And anyone who pledged loyalty to the rogue world through words or actions would inevitably smell like a rogue as well. You're LEADING the rogue world. You should smell like them, not us."

“I’m definitely feeling the love, cousin.” Greg murmured sarcastically but he couldn’t help but agree that his situation was odd.

Lucianne pushed her hair back to stop Reida from chewing on it before she explained, “You’ve always served the kingdom, Greg. That’s why you never smelled like a rogue. You were never one. You didn’t...pledge loyalty to the rogue world over the kingdom. Your actions showed that you’ve always prioritized helping the creatures that this kingdom didn’t help. You gave those who fell victim to the systems the second chance they needed to stand back up again. You may have protected the rogues, but you were never a rogue yourself because you still cared about what happened to the ones no one bothered to empathize with. A rogue wouldn’t have cared about what happened to a kingdom or anyone in a pack once they’ve been casted out. But you...even when you disappeared for sixteen years, you never stopped caring for that portion of the population.”

Greg couldn’t deny any of that. He reminisced about the times he got creatures out of prison and trained them to be his followers as he murmured, “Well, caring isn’t very difficult when one is able to...relate to them in some way.”

Lucianne and Xandar said nothing as they watched him ponder while looking at the table before he continued in a low murmur, “I wasn’t the...most well-behaved student throughout school, which should come as no surprise, and it always got me into trouble. I did do those things on purpose sometimes, but other times, it was just a miscalculation that made a prank go too far. Teachers and administrators also saw the need to either get me transferred or expelled, and the only thing that kept me in was my family’s status. I was viewed in a certain way and suddenly everything that I was actually good at became...meaningless. I didn’t want anyone else to feel that...just because they have a dark side...”

“It doesn’t mean that they can’t also be the light.” Lucianne finished for him when he was groping for the right words. He nodded in agreement, and Lucianne continued, “You harnessed their strengths the way you wished someone had helped harness yours.”

“That sounds too noble to match what I became, My Queen. Let’s not forget, I do discriminate since I only take lycans. And I did certain...” he glanced at Xandar and said, “...things...that are not worthy of forgiveness.”

Xandar muttered under his breath, “Good of you to know that.”

Lucianne's free hand reached for her husband's hand on his lap to stroke it before she said to Greg, "None of those... 'things' were right. But you don't need to be a pure, clean slate to be noble, Greg. You have a side that's darker than most, and will go through great lengths to get what you want. But you've also been the light that your followers so desperately needed to climb out of the abyss, and the beacon that kept them alive and going, and now thriving. You're not perfect, Greg. None of us are. But you are enough."

Greg's animal was so touched that it was wiping its tears and cooing in tenderness at the acceptance it was feeling. Its human part was trying to get it to snap out of it as he bit his bottom lip to hold back his own tears from surfacing. After a long moment with the only sound being Reida hitting the table with her teddy and then checking to see if all parts were still intact, Greg replied in a small voice, "Thank you, My Queen."

Xandar was very tempted to tease his cousin about those eyes that were close to watering because showing this much emotion was a big deal for someone like Greg, who had always presented a tough exterior. His wife felt his humor, knowing exactly what he wanted to do, so she squeezed his hand and threw him a stern look to stop him. Xandar ended up chuckling lightly and pecking a sweet kiss on her hand before changing the subject.

Xandar then asked, "Greg, I have one question though...when you held office, funds went missing. Did you..."

"That was NOT me." Greg argued defensively, knowing that both his cousins had been looking at him suspiciously ever since that issue surfaced all those years ago.

"Then who was it?" Lucianne asked.

Greg faced Xandar when he asked with furrowed brows, "Didn't you question how Uncle Lucas and his wife were suddenly able to afford a two-month trip halfway around the world, coming back with shopping bags of all kinds that took twenty servants three hours to get everything into the castle and in order? Also, bear in mind that they weren't the money-saving type."

Xandar thought aloud, "They told me that it was an education fund that was kept untouched for a second child that they never had, and I checked the accounts. It confir—"

Greg narrowed his eyes when Xandar met his gaze and the king matched the duke's look when he uttered, "He tampered with the accounts."

Greg uttered with a sarcastic smile, "Don't you just love the old man, cousin?"

All Xandar said was, "I hate you, Greg."

Greg scoffed in amusement like it didn't bother him one bit. "Get those cops in the hacking department to check if you want. I looked through their credentials and history. They should be able to crack this. It's not very complicated." The duke then added, "And I do admit that I wasn't very smart to buy that car at that time too. The timing was terrible. My businesses had a sudden boost, a legal one. With hindsight, I'd say I should have celebrated later."

Xandar then clarified his last lingering doubt. "About that...when you prioritized profits over caring for the people, it was because..."

Greg's face was dead serious when he continued for Xandar, "Because the people in the kingdom weren't worthy to be cared for and protected in the way that the law said they were entitled to. They were the very creatures who shunned anyone who made mistakes, practically gave outcasts like Ivory, Alissa and the others no choice but to turn rogue."

Xandar smiled in comprehension, "The profits were never for yourself. It was for them – your followers."

"That sounds a little too nice, cousin. I would have taken some for my own hard work before giving them their cut. I'm not you or Blackfur. And uh...up until I met the queen, I really didn't give a damn about wolves, so I didn't see a point in securing their safety or sharing anything with them, unlike the goody-two-shoes that you and that other cousin have been the whole time."

Xandar scoffed softly at the way he phrased things. "That's...good to know too, I guess."

Lucianne started whispering to Reida again, "See, Reida. They can get along. This was a good heart-to-heart, don't you think?" Reida chuckled again.

Greg had the sudden urge to say, "My Queen, why do I get the feeling that the princess was brought here for a reason other than to be kept an eye on?"

Lucianne mocked ignorance and said, "I have no idea what you're trying to suggest, Your Grace. My intentions have ALWAYS been the very embodiment of directness and purity."

Xandar burst out laughing first, and Greg tried but failed to press back his smile as he covered his mouth in an attempt to stifle his own laughter. It took a lot of effort to get a hold of himself before he managed to say, "If you say so, My Queen."

The two cousins knew that Lucianne was not 'always' direct or pure, especially when it came to traitors and anyone who posed a risk to the kingdom's safety. Even in her years as a Gamma, she had to think like a rogue to actually know how and where a rogue would strike. The way she was still training everyone to mislead an opponent in combat and how to not be misled exemplified that her mind was capable of manipulating others.

And, at present, although Lucianne wanted Reida close to her and Xandar, there was no denying that the princess was also being used to have the two cousins be more open about mending their relationship. Lucianne didn't expect them to like each other anytime soon, but it was great that they could finally hold a conversation without angering one another.

When Greg walked them out, the sneaky princess mouthed the only word she knew at her uncle when her mother wasn't looking. After Reida is safely strapped in the baby car seat, Greg cleared his throat and said, "I've been meaning to thank you both."

Lucianne and Xandar looked at him in bewilderment before he continued, "For what you gave Alissa."

The couple exchanged a nervous glance before Lucianne said, "We really wanted to do more, Greg. We've consulted six legal advisers who've all told us that her case had been properly tried in legal terms. The law applied and executed wasn't...wrong. Her excessive sentencing, as it turns out, was not excessive. It was legally permissible, so there was technically nothing wrong with how everything turned out."

Greg nodded with a small smile and confessed, "I know. I consulted my own set of lawyers when it happened too. But she is happy with what you gave her."

Xandar admitted, “We expected her to refuse it, to be honest. It’s just a journalistic story. It won’t change what happened to her.”

“Nothing will change what happened to her, cousin. It’s done. But the offer gives her a chance to tell everyone about what wasn’t emphasized in the media at that time, and if it goes the way we want it to, she might even get to meet her kids without fear of being arrested or shunned.”

“Let’s hope it goes that way.” Lucianne muttered.

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0 6 minutes read

It took three months for the journalist to interview Alissa and any acquaintances, friends and colleagues who knew her before she set her bonded mate on fire.

The article entitled “Alissa ‘Arson’ Arden: An Ordinary Woman With a Scarred Past and a Thriving Present” was available in print and online. It topped the charts and pushed back any other headline for the day. The shares, likes, comments and traffic garnered weren’t even this high when the news on Xandar and Lucianne’s engagement went viral.

Alissa was in her apartment that she bought for herself with the earnings made from working with Greg. When the journalist sent her a copy of the article, she let it sit for two hours before she came to terms that it was time to read it. Her heart thumped as she took a deep breath. Her thumb tapped on the link that led her to the website, and she started reading.

“Love is what we all crave. Affection. Attention. Devotion. It is the very emotion that brings us together and blurs the lines between species. As lycans and werewolves, we are said to have an advantage. Said.

You and I have heard of the countless tales about how gracious the Moon Goddess was to do the heavy lifting by simply bonding two creatures together who then went on to live happily ever after. Tales like these have swept us off our feet, and for the most part, made us hope that we too would be so blessed to be bonded to that one very special creature who would be absolutely perfect for us.

On a usual day, after the usual cup of coffee, on the trip to the usual grocery store, you catch an unusual scent. You follow it. It follows you. At the end of the trail, you find it – your perfect mate.

But is this creature truly perfect? Is the mate-bond really a blessing of promised love and devotion, or is it sometimes a curse in disguise?

Twenty-eight years ago, a then 23-year-old woman by the name of Alissa Arden had to find out the hard way that, in her case, it was unfortunately the latter. After meeting her bonded mate, Dickxon Ghouse, in a local grocery store, Dickxon did what we often see in movies – call it quits with the girl by his side in pursuit of the mate gifted to him by our Goddess.

Alissa herself left the man she was with for the same reason after a week of Dickxon's relentless persuasion through notes and flowers sent to the apartment she shared with her boyfriend.

...

The day of the verdict came after six long years of arduous work. Her sentencing of twenty years imprisonment was seen as a failure of the legal system because, as the Daily Piece put it, "twenty years behind bars is not enough to balance the scales of justice. It does not compensate for the loss of a creature's life, and it is disrespectful to our Goddess who bonded her sacred gift to this reckless monster."

The Central Headlines even curated public views for their article "Has justice been served on Arson Arden?", which contained mostly views that Alissa "took things too far", as one anonymous respondent said, because if things really were that bad, "she should have just done the logical thing of taking the kids and leaving without a fuss. You can't change someone who doesn't want to change." When asked whether they would've let the same thing happen to them, most responded "No", with only two respondents saying, "I hope not."

The Morning Message had a more varied set of responses, with some, like those who spoke to Central Headlines saying that Alissa "brought that fire of hers from hell and should go back there", but others felt that there may be facts that weren't disclosed to the public. One respondent readily admitted to this by saying, "I don't know her, but I wouldn't want to mess with her. I've been a little more cautious with my own girlfriend after reading about it."

As much as there was to squeeze out of the tale, there will always come a time when the media would have to leave this dock and lower their sails in search of the next big scoop. Some argued that they have left the dock too early because as the vibrant flames of Alissa's case smothered with the execution of the prison sentence and everyone assumed that the ember was cooling into a cinder, which would turn into something useless and unattractive, they were proven wrong when, two weeks into Alissa's sentencing, she was reported to have escaped.

Searches were conducted and news was spread. The hunt for the 'monster' who lost her home, job and children was on. Weeks turned into months, which turned into years. Alissa Arden was never found.

We learn today that her escape took place in the middle of the night, and she was nursed back to health before she commenced her training to work for the duke, Greg Claw. When asked whether the duke assisted in her escape and kept her hidden for romantic intentions, Alissa laughed.

"His Grace isn't the type to ask you for one thing and then use you for another. If he gets you to work, you're his employee. If he gets one to serve his needs when she's offering herself or when she's in that particular line of work, then she is his bed companion for the night. Intentions and expectations have always been very clear when it came to him, and it's something that I am very grateful for."

When asked whether she herself developed anything for the duke beyond their professional relationship over the years, she looked at me like I haven't been paying attention before she threw out a low and curt "no".

Alissa claims that she works 'mostly in the security side of things', which can range from standing around and watching as others work, or scrutinizing data on a computer. The duke has confirmed via email that this sufficiently describes her job scope.

Some may wonder whether she will be returning to prison to serve the remainder of her sentence now that she's no longer missing. The simple answer to that is no. Alissa and many others who worked for His Grace had been granted pardon by their Highnesses after successfully helping the kingdom and our neighboring empire to track down and eliminate a set of rogues and proditors who were cooperating to challenge the crown. The conditional pardon covered all offenses except murder, so it covers Alissa's circumstance as well seeing that hers was a case of manslaughter.

Today, she is a free woman who had yet met the children she had given birth to and undoubtedly misses dearly, but she knows that they're all doing well, having looked them up on the Internet many times over the years, expressing to me how grateful she is for having such 'good, stable families' to raise them.

She remains unsure of whether she should reach out to them, expressing her fear of how she may be viewed, given what she had done to their birth father. Alissa doesn't plan to make any major shifts in her life at the moment, claiming to be paid well and has a good professional and social circle. She intends to continue working for His Grace in the security department, and see where her career takes her next.

When asked whether she would have done anything differently, her response was instant, 'I would've rejected him. I should've never trusted him over my gut. I didn't know any better. If I went back and started over, I would've rejected him the day we met at the grocery store.'

When Alissa came to the end of the article, she placed her phone back on the table and continued staring at the laptop screen that was displaying her sons' contact information. One became a physician, who would undoubtedly be very busy; one was an assistant manager of a 5-star hotel; and the last one became a firefighter. Alissa couldn't help but chuckle to herself at the last one.

Perhaps she could just send them emails? If they allowed her to see them, then she would make the trip. If not, she would just watch them from afar like she had been doing all along.

Once the emails were typed and perfected, she wondered if she was reaching out too soon. The article came out just hours ago. What if they needed the time and space to think things through first? Or what if they didn't even come across the article yet?

Then, there was a knock at the door.

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0 8 minutes read

Alissa's furrowed brows and puzzled eyes shifted to the door, and her defensive instincts kicked in. She extracted the hard drive from her laptop and slid it into the custom-sewn compartment in her jeans. Reaching for the loaded gun and heading for the door, she tried to guess who that could be. The property was bought under an alias. Her landlady never came up in the

last ten years she stayed here. Greg and the others usually gave her a heads-up before dropping by.

She looked through the keyhole to see if she was able to get anything from the slit. All she saw was a sand-color shirt. She was also picking up a delightful yet somewhat familiar scent of oak and rain. The knock came again. She pressed her ear to the door, where she heard a heavy sigh before something was placed on the floor as the footsteps retreated.

Alissa waited for the footsteps to fade into the background before she slowly opened the door. To her shock, a bouquet of red roses that was placed leaning against the door fell on her feet. She picked it up and skimmed through the flowers for explosives, cameras and bugs before her head tilted outside to see whether the creature who left it there was still around.

The frame that was at the end of the corridor looked very familiar, and when the man turned to his side, Alissa called out in disbelief, "Gabriel?"

The man's face snapped up at her voice. Their eyes met as he mouthed, "Alissa."

He sprinted to her. His mouth opened but he didn't know what to say. In the end, all he asked was, "Can I hold you?"

Upon hearing that, Alissa leapt into his arms while still holding onto the bouquet with one hand and her gun with the other, and that was when she felt the sparks travelled throughout her being as her lycan wagged its tail and declared 'mate'.

Gabriel held her close and inhaled deeply from her neck. His lycan already knew that its mate was behind the door the moment he stepped out of the elevator. He was relieved that the scent led to Alissa's apartment, but he was also nervous and remorseful. He somehow felt responsible for what happened to her. When he knocked and she didn't answer, he thought she didn't want to see him, and was leaving with a broken heart.

He never imagined she would jump into his arms like how she just did. He missed her scent of camomile and lemongrass. He missed her. "I am so sorry. I should have never let you leave. I should have sent you flowers. I should have loved you more. I should have..."

Alissa smashed her lips on his, and it didn't take long for Gabriel to respond in equal enthusiasm. When they were out of breath, Alissa muttered, "I'm sorry...for doubting you, for doubting us. I was so stupid. I..."

"No, don't say that, Ali." His rough hand reached for her smooth cheek, and she leaned into his touch the same way she did all those years ago.

When she saw one of her neighbors coming out, they decided to continue their conversation inside. They sat on the couch with Gabriel's arm caging her body from the side so that she didn't sit too far away from him. He explained that he got her address from the journalist, who he bribed by offering her inside information on a rival company's scandal that she was investigating.

Gabriel held her hand as he explained, "After you left, I thought about calling you, seeing you, but I always...chickened out. When I heard that you had kids with...him, I just...I thought my chance was blown. I left town, and the next time I came back was when...the news about you and him exploded. I tried to visit you at the station but they told me that you were only allowed visits by your lawyer. I came to the trial a few times. I'm not sure if you've seen me."

Alissa was visibly uneasy when she confessed, "I almost didn't see anyone during the trial. I just kept my head low to avoid the cameras."

"Yeah." There was a moment of silence before he said, "Your boys are doing quite well though. They got your eyes. The physician even got your smile."

Alissa's brows furrowed in suspicion. How did he know? Gabriel scratched the back of his head and confessed, "I might have...stalked them on the internet from time to time. I didn't see anything before they got social media accounts though, I swear."

"How do you even know their names?"

He held her closer and said, "That wasn't the hard part. I just had to comb through the local authority's adoption list and find three kids with the dead guy's last name and make sure the kids' first names are from characters of your favorite movies."

Alissa blinked before she asked, "You went through an adoption list?"

Gabriel nodded. "It's a long list. Lots of weird names."

"So...you found those families for my boys?"

"No, Ali. I wished I had. I'm glad they've been in good hands. I uh...went through the list at that time because I wanted to see if...I could take them."

Alissa just stared at him like he spoke gibberish before she clarified, "You wanted to adopt my triplets?"

Gabriel pointed at her face and said, "The lady at the desk gave me that exact same look when I applied. My application was rejected, obviously. She very crudely told me that when it came to taking care of the kids, an ex-boyfriend is about as reliable as the imprisoned mother."

Alissa's eyes fumed with raged when she snarled and cursed, "That mother f—"

"Hey hey...calm down. The old lady was just doing her job." Gabriel began stroking her forearms, both scared and elated that he got to see Alissa's anger again. "Look, the point is...you lost them once. Now that you're free and your name is...less tainted after helping the royal family and all of that, maybe you should consider paying them a visit."

Gabriel recalled the part of the article where Alissa mentioned she was unsure about reaching out to her triplets. He gazed at her in concern, peering into her eyes as he tried to decipher what she really wanted.

Alissa confessed, "I drafted the emails but I haven't sent them. I don't know if I should."

He whispered encouragingly, "Of course you should!"

"What if they don't want to see me?"

"What if they do? Ali, c'mon. What's the worst that could happen? We can still make the trip to stalk them if they refuse."

"I've already been stalking...watching them...from afar, that is." Alissa muttered.

Gabriel's franticness calmed with that realization. "So that's why you're still delaying this. You've already seen them."

She leaned against his shoulder when she said, “Still, it’ll be nice to meet them. I’m quite intrigued by the one who chose to be a firefighter.”

Without warning, Gabriel carried her and put her into her chair at the desk. He opened the laptop and said, “Go on. Do it.”

And she did. She took a deep breath and clicked the ‘Send’ buttons. Now the pain was having to wait for a response.

Within an hour, one reply came, from the son who became a hotel assistant manager, which said, “Thank Goddess! We’ve been trying to find out your location for hours, mom. That journalist who interviewed you isn’t very helpful, is she? Three of us called her asking for your address, and she entertained none of us, saying that everyone had been claiming to be your children today.

We were even willing to send our birth certificates to prove it, and she flicked us off, saying that she already had seventeen poorly-photoshopped copies and we shouldn’t bother sending more. F*cking idiot.

Anyway, the three of us already planned to meet tonight to figure out how to find you, but since you’ve reached out, we’d love to come see you. Looking forward to receiving your address. Let us know where you’d like to meet.

Triplet #2

Caleb

P.S. the only reason this response came late is because triplet #1, Dr Oliver, was too busy to check his phone. He’s the worst amongst us, mom. Busy. Busy. Busy.”

Alissa cried so hard when she read the response, and Gabriel had to calm her long enough for her to send Caleb the address of a restaurant down the street before he helped shut her laptop and continue letting her cry into his chest.

When she finally calmed down, she got out of his embrace and went through her wardrobe to take out her best dress. After dressing up and checking her appearance in the mirror, Gabriel could tell that she was nervous by the way her chest rose and fell. He asked in amusement, “Ali, were you this nervous when we went out?”

She forgot about her nerves for a moment when she narrowed her eyes and replied, "No. You're one guy. I'm meeting three tonight. There's a huge difference."

He chuckled before reaching out to hold her waist and telling her that she looked beautiful, making her smile wider and eyes shine brighter. After sharing a kiss, they left the apartment and made their way to the restaurant. They were twenty minutes early. Her crossed legs were fidgeting, and Gabriel did everything he could to calm her, from stroking her hand to speaking to her. When the twenty minutes were up and the triplets were still not in sight, Alissa started getting restless.

What if they changed their minds and stood her up? What if whoever sent the response was a prankster? The maverick part of her began mentally plotting on how to make the prankster suffer if her triplets didn't show up and she found out that it was someone pulling her leg.

Ten minutes later, three men with identical features stepped in through the doors, and Alissa burst into tears again. They each took turns to hold the woman who gave birth to them, with Caleb making sure that Oliver went last since he was to be blamed for their tardiness. The triplets sized up Gabriel when Alissa introduced them, Oliver being the most skeptical. Ryan and Caleb weren't worried. Their mother could always set this one on fire if he turned out to be a dick.

Much to Alissa's surprise and relief, none of her boys appeared to be carrying any resentment for what she did. The youngest, Ryan, even found it 'cool'. Caleb agreed it was cool so long as it didn't happen in the hotel he worked at. The rest of the night was mostly hearing about their childhood, schooling days and university life.

It was the best date that Alissa had been on. She didn't want it to end, but when it was time to say goodbye and goodnight, Alissa mentioned that she'd like to meet their respective adoptive parents. Only Caleb was horrified because he was nowhere near obedient in his childhood years. This time, Oliver made sure that they all visited Caleb's parents first.

"Fvck." Triplet #2 cursed.

Alissa linked Greg, Ivory, Desmond and Hailey, telling them that she reconnected with her sons and would be out of town for a few weeks, briefly mentioning Gabriel. They were all happy for her. When Greg was in the midst

of asking her to 'take care', he typed in 'Gabriel Bafford' on his phone and started his research. He and the other three of the top four only called it a day when they finished reading every single piece of information there was on the man so that they could sleep knowing that Alissa would be safe.

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 140 - Tips

0 5 minutes read

3 months later

Alissa was pulling Gabriel by his arm through the rows of white, yellow and beige flowers in a nature park where Tate and Margaret decided to have their wedding ceremony. In the sea of White Blood pack members, Alissa finally found the creature she was looking for.

"My Queen, this is Gabriel, my second-chance mate and husband. Gabriel, this is our queen." Alissa said with the widest smile that Lucianne had ever seen. Alissa and Gabriel tied the knot two months ago in the marriage registrar's office, with only the attendance of her triplets, Gabriel's brother, Greg, Hailey, Desmond and Ivory.

Lucianne smiled warmly at the nervous-looking man in a tuxedo. "Well, it's a pleasure to finally meet you, Gabriel. We've heard a lot about you from Alissa, of course. It's great to be able to finally put the name on a face."

"I-It's an honor to meet you, My Queen. Uh...you look great. How far along are you, if I may ask?"

Xandar, who had an arm across his wife's shoulder, smiled proudly while Lucianne glanced at her baby bump before she replied, "Fourteen weeks. This is our second and final pregnancy."

At that moment, a familiar voice joined the conversation from the side, "See, what did I tell you, Ella? There's a double dynamite in there."

Lucianne briefly embraced Ella, who had been released two days ago. The queen sensed a slight difference in the hybrid but she didn't know how just yet. Lucianne then held her best friend in a tight h.ug. That was when she realized Toby felt leaner, his shoulders were broader and he smelled a little different. She parted their bodies and looked him in the eye, which shone in happiness as he tried but failed to press back a broadening smile because he knew he'd been caught.

Lucianne's eyes widened in realization before they went to his neck, where she saw a fresh mark. Her mouth hung open for a moment as she looked back-and-forth between Toby and an increasingly blushing Ella before wrapping Toby in a second hug while speaking intentionally loudly, "AWWW...I'M SO HAPPY FOR YOU TWO! IT MUST HAVE BEEN A GREAT NIGHT!"

Many paused their conversations and turned towards them. The alliance members were already coming over, as were many White Blood members. Ella was flustered and stood closer to her mate. Toby knew exactly why Lucianne did what she did. This was payback for exposing hers and her mate's first time the previous year. The minister narrowed his eyes at his best friend as Xandar chuckled from her side.

Toby complained, "Lucy, this isn't fair. I didn't wake you up at 4 a.m. with my business."

Lucianne asked in mocked innocence, "So, what time did you guys do it then?"

Ella looked horrified, which made Lucianne say, "I'm kidding, Ella. Really. I'm just messing with Toby."

She sighed in relief, and the alliance members came over to congratulate them with appropriate wishes, as did the mavericks, thus easing Ella's anxiety. In the midst of that, Toby locked eyes with Lucianne and linked, 'Around eight last night, so the point stands – you and your mate are still the insane ones.'

Lucianne chuckled as he ended the link to concentrate on whatever Hale was saying to Ella. The moment Lucianne's eyes cleared, Hailey came into her field of vision with a frown when she asked, "Reida isn't here, My Queen?"

Lucianne replied, "She is. She's with her uncle." Her eyes started searching when she muttered, "Where is he?"

"Which uncle?"

"Greg."

Hailey smiled and said, "I'll go find him."

###

"And this is a spider." Greg said as he sat under a tree while securing Reida tightly with one arm, his free hand at a distance from her face for her to observe the spider on his palm which was lost on which way it should go. Greg was hoping to find animal manure that was used as fertilizer so that he could point to it and train Reida to say 'dada', but there wasn't a single heap in sight, so he had to settle with entertaining her with the insects and spiders instead.

"Now, watch this, princess." Greg turned his palm over and the spider's legs reached for his finger before a web formed, and the arachnid hung by its self-made thread. Reida's large eyes looked at the dangling eight-legged creature in wonder.

"My turn, Your Grace!" Hailey's voice made Greg flinch, and the spider fell and scurried away.

He turned and looked at her in annoyance. "What do you mean 'your turn'? She's MY niece."

"Exactly. You'll get invited to family events from now on. I don't. You'll have more opportunities to hold her than I do. Come on. Hand over the princess."

Greg groaned, turned to Reida, and said, "Auntie Hailey is going to take you now. If you don't like what she's doing, what should you say?"

"Fvck!" Reida could say 'mama', 'dada', 'yay' and 'no' now, so it was crucial to her uncle that she knew which word to use at any given time.

"Atta girl." Greg praised before planting a quick kiss on Reida's forehead, a gesture which shocked himself and Hailey. Reida chuckled like she did whenever her parents kissed her there, and her tiny hand reached out to touch Greg's nose before she let out a cute coo, melting her uncle's heart.

He placed Reida into Hailey's arms, careful not to look her in the eye. Hailey knew her boss didn't want her to see the happy tears pooling there, so she walked the other way, plucking leaves, grass and flowers for Reida to play with.

###

Lucianne's feet started getting tired despite wearing flats, and her hand instinctively went to Xandar's shoulder for support. He held her by her arm and waist when he suggested, "Babe, why don't we go sit down? You've been standing too long."

"Yeah, okay."

He guided her to the chairs, and she lowered herself into one of those in the row reserved for the alliance members, which was right in front. Xandar pecked a kiss on her forehead before he got down to take off her shoes.

He began rubbing her right foot before Lucianne pulled it back and whispered, "I'm fine, Xandar. That's not necessary."

Xandar could feel that her feet were tired, but he also felt her embarrassment. When he noticed her glancing around and realized why she was refusing the foot rub, he sighed and got up to kiss her cheek before muttering, "I've already knelt before you in front of the entire kingdom, and you're still embarrassed to have me rub your feet in public?"

Without hesitation, she replied, "Yes!"

He scoffed lightly. "Fine. I'll do this later on the jet." After washing his hands, he got her some water before returning to stroke her belly. When he felt the kicking, his eyes glistened in pure happiness. Xandar planted a deep kiss on Lucianne's temple before muttering, "I love you."

"I know. I love you, too."

The wedding planner made an announcement and got everyone to take their seats. The groom came into view, all dressed in white with a blue and black estella pinned on the lapel of his tux. Xandar helped Lucianne slip her shoes back on before kissing her hand, then leaving her side to join Tate with Juan, Toby, Zeke, Raden, Christian, Phelton and Beta Mannon. Juan, as Tate's best man, was the first to convey his congratulations to his old friend.