

## The Rogues Who Went Rogue

### Chapter 17

Lucianne blinked at Greg's question before she admitted, "Well, there weren't any eye-witnesses to begin with, but I doubt they can be wrong about scents, Your Grace."

"Right. About that, there's something called scent sprays, My Queen. Illegal substances, but they do exist. One can essentially hide their scents by leaving an entirely different scent behind."

"You're saying that there are sprays with the scents of lycans and werewolves in your world?"

"Werewolves. Lycans. Vampires. Humans. Rogues..."

"Why would one need a scent spray of a rogue?"

"To throw the authorities off-track, My Queen."

"Ah. That makes sense, too," Lucianne nodded in understanding. She looked more like a curious learner than an angered authoritative figure at the moment. In fact, Greg sensed no anger at all despite just telling her about something that practically went against the system she was defending.

Her curious bright eyes even encouraged him to give more than he was asked, so he did, "Human scents are the worst, by the way. Their general scent is very varied, unlike ours which is quite standard. And because of that, scent sprays for this species are

normally tailored to a specific region or group. And there'll be different scents when they sweat. It really is a hassle. If I ever start a business selling scent sprays, I'm dead certain about never taking human scents into my inventory. Most of them would expire before they're bought off the shelf."

Lucianne chuckled briefly at Greg's candid admission, and although this warmed Greg's heart, it pissed-off Xandar. Registering her husband's jealousy through their bond, Lucianne quickly moved on, "So, what you're saying is that it couldn't be werewolves or lycans who abducted the vampires?"

"Well, I'm not saying that it's impossible but...it would be very, very...very difficult without bloodshed. How deep in vampire territory was this village, My Queen?"

"The empress said that it was about an hour's run to the closest wolf pack."

"Any footprints?" Greg asked.

"That's where things get odd, Your Grace. It seems that the lycan and wolf prints just go round and round the village. It leads to nowhere beyond that."

"Are those real prints or faked ones, My Queen?"

Lucianne's shoulders slumped as she asked in exhaustion, "Your kind has gadgets to fake those, too?"

"Well, I won't call them 'gadgets' per se, My Queen.

But they have this rubber mold that can make similar prints on the ground.”

“Oh, Goddess,” Lucianne muttered in dismay as her fingers started stroking her forehead.

“There is some good news, My Queen,” Greg began. When Lucianne’s eyes met his, he continued, “That rubber mould doesn’t make an exact print. If you compare a real print from a fake one, you can see that the way a fake print is pushed to the ground is fairly different from how an actual lycan or werewolf would leave a print. You’ve seen real prints in your time on the battlegrounds so you’d be able to tell the difference, I’m sure. Perhaps you could request to see those in the village to conclude whether they’re real.”

Huh. Lucianne didn’t think of that. She didn’t think prints could be faked. Period.

Greg then added, “And about scent sprays, My Queen, I must inform you that the best sprays only leave a synthetic scent for up to 40 hours at most. It fades faster than a natural scent does. A creature’s natural odor can linger up to 48 hours, give or take. If one were to investigate again after the 40-hour timeframe, she might pick up something other than werewolves or lycans.”

When Lucianne made sense of whatever she was being told, she muttered, “That’s good to know,” she then asked, “So, in your view, who could’ve abducted the vampires? The vampires themselves?”

"That would be my best guess with whatever I'm told as of now, My Queen. But with new developments, I might come to a different conclusion."

"Okay," Lucianne nodded once in agreement before she straightened her back and spoke in seriousness, "Now, it's your turn, Your Grace. You were asking for a ...conditional pardon for certain creatures - they assist us and we relieve them of all legal consequences from past crimes. I'm a little reluctant to ask but does this include the creature who sent me the message on your behalf?"

Greg nodded once and answered simply, "Yes, My Queen."

"Alright," Lucianne mouthed inaudibly as she digested the fact that Greg was admitting to someone breaking into prison just to get one message from her cousin-in-law before leaving without a trace.

Trying to stay on subject, she shook herself out of her daze and declared, "I can't give you an answer yet, Your Grace. I must speak to the king and the rest of the ministers. But regarding the concoction to challenge the Queen's Authority, I must ask...do you think it will succeed?"

From Greg's ominous look, Lucianne already got her answer. Nonetheless, the duke muttered, "When I still had my freedom, I heard insane things like this all the time. Most were scams, out to suck your money in the name of investment. But some weren't just big

talk. There are very ambitious creatures down there, and a notable handful are quite determined to succeed. The word I received about the concoction doesn't sound like a fluff because a fluff doesn't create a seismic shift in our world. It normally just dies off without making any visible impact. But...this has turned the wheels of our system, and it's not stopping. In fact, from whatever I've been told recently...it seems like the momentum is only gaining speed. Creatures and systems don't change unless something is motivating them to change. Whatever that something is, it must have made a big promise, and the concoction fits the bill."

"So, it will happen. Any idea how long we have?"

"Five to six months or so, I suppose. But it really is better to get this cleaned up sooner than that, My Queen. With advancing technologies and new substances within reach everyday, it is possible that they can get lucky and achieve what they seek to achieve within three months."

"Three months," Lucianne muttered to herself. She gave a firm nod before getting up from her seat, and Greg followed suit.

"I'll get back to you on your request for the conditional pardon. For clarification purposes, how many people are we talking about here, those who can help?"

Greg cleared his throat and confessed in a low

murmur, "Ninety-eight. Rogues. Lycans."

The thought that Greg had been hiding ninety-eight rogue lycans made Lucianne's eyes widened in shock for a brief second before she composed herself, and tried to keep her voice steady when she responded, "Okay. I'll get back to you on that. Thank you for your time, Your Grace."

She thrust out her hand for a handshake, and when Greg was starting to kneel again, her stern eyes bore into his as she spoke firmly, "Don't, Your Grace. Just remain standing, and shake my hand."

Greg was used to offering Lucianne nothing but the highest form of respect, not just because she was his queen, but because she was the only creature who deserved that form of respect. He wanted to disregard whatever she just said and knelt anyway but her eyes demanded that he gave in to her. So, very reluctantly, he remained standing and shook her hand awkwardly as he fought the urge to peck a formal kiss on it.

Lucianne saw and felt Greg's discomfort. And when she released his hand, there was a trace of humor in her eyes when she asked rhetorically with a small smile, "You're a lot like Christian when it comes to heeding to formalities, aren't you, Your Grace?"

Greg went completely speechless, and the corner of Lucianne's lips curled up even more when she turned to leave.

After the door closed behind her, Greg replayed what

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she just said to him. His animal wondered if this was karma for what he did to Blackfur's duchess, that a Blackfur trait somehow infected Greg himself. The thought made his animal gag. No. No way. He couldn't be like his distant cousin. That guy was lame and naïve. Lucianne had to be joking...right?



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