

## The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 41 - Tips

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After Alissa felt a little better, she loosened her grip over Lucianne, and the queen got the cue to let the woman go. After Alissa met Lucianne's comforting orbs and offered her a firm nod and a smile as a sign of gratitude, Lucianne returned her gesture before turning towards Desmond.

Desmond approached her with a wide grin and extended his hand before he said, "Sup, queen? The name's Desmond Derulos."

Xandar's eyebrows raised for two reasons. One, for the informal way Desmond was speaking to Lucianne, who was, in Xandar's eyes, the most powerful creature in the kingdom. Two, for the very reason that Desmond Derulos was the infamous con artist who posed as a CEO of a ghost company that sucked money out of investors.

The king's sights moved to his wife, who showed no adversity towards Desmond, so Xandar continued to watch in silence. Desmond continued introducing himself, "Professional pickpocket and former con. Arrested and convicted for the con work."

Lucianne smiled and her eyes shone with interest as she acknowledged in realization, "The Money Retriever."

Desmond chuckled and said, "Yea. Ain't good at covering my tracks at that time. Only got better when the boss hired me." His head motioned towards Greg, and Lucianne glanced at the Duke who was pressing his fingers against his lips to hide his smile which was very hard to hold back.

Desmond was known as 'the Money Retriever' by the general public, but pinned as one of the most wanted criminals by law enforcement. What was fascinating about this crime was that Desmond only conned the rich CEOs who were exploiting their employees by paying them less while taking most of the profits and dividends.

Desmond's heist was that he'd research the people he'd go after first, before attending events that those CEOs would attend. At the event, he would single out his targets, make an impression with sophisticated mannerism and language while displaying just the right amount of confidence and charm when talking about the likely success of his fictitious business to lure his victims in. Those who met him without knowing that he was fake later testified that

Desmond appeared well-mannered, poised, posh, and was the epitome of a successful businessman.

If someone who wasn't his target expressed an interest in investing, Desmond would act pompous and wave them off like they weren't worthy to be his investor. But the truth was that Desmond didn't want to con the non-targets' money because those were good people who treated their staff right. After bagging the targets, Desmond would disappear.

And on every Nouvelan, Desmond took all the money he collected from the abusive CEOs and dispensed the sums in equal amounts to their employees with the message 'Happy Nouvelan. M.R.'. The thing that had always warmed Desmond's heart was when these employees posted pictures or videos of themselves expressing their thanks on the Internet, that the money helped in paying rent, buying daily necessities, getting insurance or even getting new clothes and toys for their children.

Sadly, the heist only lasted four years before he was caught around two decades ago, before Xandar ascended the throne. The investors were elated, of course, and demanded the justice system make Desmond repay every last dime they were cheated off, even asking for compensation for the 'traumatizing experience'.

But Desmond didn't have the amount of money he stole since he had already given away everything that he had stolen. The victimized investors knew about their employees' sudden windfall, which came merely months after they were conned of their money, and sought a court order to make their employees return the amounts.

The only problem? There was no hard evidence showing that the investment money given to Desmond was the 'same money' that was later channeled to the employees. Desmond conned a few companies at once, and pooled everything into one account. Essentially, the money was 'mixed' before being used to make legitimate investments in legal, reputable businesses, and Desmond took the sum back out along with the small amounts of dividends made a few months later.

Now, this 'new' money was considered to be Desmond's legitimate earnings from smart investing. Since the money was his in legal terms, it was HIS money who went to the exploited employees. It was no longer the abusive

employers' money. Thus, the prosecution could not establish that what Desmond gave away was the 'same money' as what he took. Therefore, the court couldn't grant a court order, and the recipients of Desmond's heist were legally allowed to keep the money.

Desmond was convicted for money laundering and theft, which carried a measly fine compared to the hefty amounts he took and gave away over the years. The biggest blow for the CEOs was that their stolen funds couldn't be recovered when Desmond filed for bankruptcy when he couldn't pay the fine. And since he had almost no assets that could be seized and sold, none of the CEOs were ever 'paid back'.

To say that the CEOs were furious would be putting it too lightly. Most of them were so infuriated that they resorted to taking matters into their own hands. Assassins were sought out and hired, which was where Greg came in.

Lucianne asked Desmond, "So, you weren't abducted and taken hostage like what the media presumed after your disappearance from police custody. You disappeared because the duke offered shelter and protection."

Desmond added like an excited friend, "AND tutorials to up my sk!!l set. Ain't like those college classes but like real practice in the field, ya know? And that ain't even the best part. 'Cause the boss is this big guy in the rogue world, I became 110% bulletproof. The boss told those k!!lers that if they touched me, he'd burn their family and friends. Ain't that great?!"

Xandar's brows raised at what Desmond termed 'great'. He looked at his cousin leaning against the wall, and had to ask, "You weren't really going to do that, were you?"

Greg's eyes reluctantly met Xandar's disapproving sight as he declared in a low voice, "I don't make empty threats, cousin. It's not good for my reputation. And the plan was never to burn them to death, just enough to incapacitate them so those who crossed me remember the lesson."

Sensing the rising tension, Lucianne quickly asked Desmond, "I've been itching to know something for years, Desmond: did you have everyone in your net before you were caught?"

Desmond's smile froze for a second before he glanced at the Duke with an excited grin and pointed at Lucianne as he said, "I like her, boss. She's cool."

Greg rolled his eyes but was also finding it hard to suppress his smile when he spoke flatly, "Get on with it, Desmond. The queen asked you a question."

Desmond continued speaking, "Damn, ya're a cool queen. And if ya askin' 'bout that game I pulled off 22 years ago, then no. There were three more on the loose. Din get to bag them on time, ya know?"

Greg wasn't sure how to feel about his people over-talking anymore. He found it amusing when they spoke about their pasts because Lucianne's follow-up questions were more hilarious than awkward, and the fact that Lucianne displayed no disapproval was not only surprising, it was also encouraging.

Even so, Greg felt that Lucianne shouldn't have to carry the emotional baggage of people she hardly knew. She was a queen, not a therapist. Then again, wouldn't the best queen be one who at least took the trouble to get to know her people, no matter what their pasts were and what society labeled them as?

As Greg's mind trapped itself in this conflicted loop, he eagerly awaited Lucianne's brilliant follow-up question that was nowhere near predictable. The suspense had his animal wagging its tail in excitement and his heart pounding in anticipation.

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Upon hearing that Desmond didn't get everyone he was out to con, Lucianne frowned and commented, "Well, that's a bummer."

Greg snorted and Desmond chuckled before the latter said, "Yea. Tough playin' superhero when ya play alone, ya know what I'm sayin'?"

"I do," Lucianne gave a firm nod with a smile, and glanced at Ivory, Hailey and Alissa before she added, "Good that you have a team now, then."

"Oh, this ain't the team, ma'am. We're just the top four. Boss's team is huge!" Desmond said with pride.

Lucianne turned to Greg before she said, "I guess I shouldn't expect anything less."

Xandar then whispered into her ear, "But if it's so huge, how have they been moving about? We have policemen and warriors on constant duty in all corners of lycan territory."

She whispered back, "They probably used clever disguises and scent sprays, darling."

Desmond clapped once like he just won a game of bingo and pointed at Lucianne as he said, "Ya're good, ya know that?! Man, if ya ain't queen, boss will definitely take ya in."

Xandar's hand went from her waist to her abdomen as he held her even closer. Lucianne then spoke to him in a gentle, assuring voice, "Darling, relax. That was purely hypothetical."

Greg begged to differ. He would have definitely taken her in...no, that wasn't an accurate way of putting things. If Lucianne weren't the queen, she'd be the first creature Greg would beg to let him take under his wing...but she might have to humiliate him before a crowd first, like what she did in the dining hall when they first met. It was her creative comeback and killer retort at that time that sparked the interest Greg had in her, and the interest turned into admiration before it deepened into something far greater than anything he could ever imagine feeling.

"Shh...Xandar, we're okay. We're okay. Shh..." Lucianne's hushed cooing brought Greg out of his thoughts, and the duke finally noticed that his cousin's glare was on him while Lucianne was stroking her husband's cheeks. Realization dawned on Greg that he had been staring at the queen for too long. With extreme difficulty, he rolled his eyes before looking the other way to avoid having to see Xandar peck a statement kiss on Lucianne's forehead.

When that was settled, Greg asked where Lucianne would prefer meeting the rest of his people to discuss the plan. At this point, Lucianne expressed her wish to go to the rest instead of having them come to her. Greg seemed reluctant to allow Lucianne make the trip to the Den but when Alissa and Ivory mind-linked him about how it was better to bring Lucianne there, and to come clean of everything they have in their arsenal from the very start, the duke gave in.

Ivory tossed Greg the car keys, which the duke swiftly caught like he had done it a hundred times before, and the two of them along with Alissa got into Greg's car. Xandar and Lucianne tailed from behind; Hailey and Desmond behind them; and Laurent, Katie and Dave behind them in two separate police cars.

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As Lucianne looked out the window, Xandar reached for her hand as he asked, "How did you know to trust them?"

"Hm. What was that, darling?" She blinked herself out of her daze when she asked.

The shine in her eyes never ceased to make his heart skip a beat. With one hand on the steering wheel, he lifted her hand and pecked a kiss before he asked, "Greg's team, baby. How did you know to trust them?"

Lucianne shrugged and said, "They had more to lose than to gain by backstabbing us. Besides, it didn't feel like they were up to no good."

As he stroked the back of her hand, he continued to question, "How did you..feel it though?"

"Like how anyone feels it, Xandar. There's this...instinct built in our subconscious that tells us whether someone is good or...not so good. Humans have it, too. Ours is better, of course, thanks to our animals' heightened awareness of any creature's energy."

"So...you just...felt that they were...okay?"

"Yeah. You did too."

Xandar snorted because he thought Lucianne was joking, until she didn't laugh along, which was when he said, "Babe, c'mon. We both know that's not true."

Lucianne looked at him quizzically before she said, "You're doubting the animal instinct of the most powerful creature in the kingdom, My King?"

He pecked another kiss on her hand before he declared with a smile, “For the record, the most powerful creature in this kingdom is you, my love. And I never doubted yours or your animal’s instinct.”

Lucianne muttered to herself, “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

She sat up and, as her husband drove, continued explaining, “Xandar, your animal didn’t feel any danger from them. If it did, it wouldn’t have let me stand so close to Ivory and the others. You would have pushed me to the back, using your body as a shield, like when we thought the vampires were going to attack the other night in Polje.”

Xandar felt his animal concede, but something still didn’t sit right with his human part. “I wasn’t completely comfortable back there, though.”

“Yeah, but was that because of them or because of your cousin?” Xandar’s grip instantly tightened before he sighed and loosened his hold and continued stroking Lucianne’s hand affectionately.

“Let’s try this, Xandar: when you heard about their pasts, what did you feel?”

“What do you mean?” Xandar doubted he felt anything.

“Did you feel the threat of danger, sadness, happiness—”

Without a second thought, Xandar exclaimed, “Goddess, definitely not happiness. What happened to them is wrong in so many ways.”

“Exactly,” Lucianne uttered. “If they weren’t good people, you wouldn’t feel like they had been wronged after what they did. Think about it, you’ve met many creatures in your years as Crown Prince and King, how often have your preliminary instincts about creatures you just met been wrong, especially as you aged?”

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Lucianne gave Xandar a moment before she continued, “Creatures with the right moral compass have the ability to feel anyone with accuracy, Xandar. Those of us with a firm set of principles and values have an innate ability to detect both good and bad intentions, from one’s choice of words and actions, if not from one’s presence. When we allow our animals to guide us in meeting

new people or gauging a new situation in an unknown environment, some part of us just...knows how to differentiate between good and bad.”

Xandar’s smile broadened by the second, and he planted a deep, long kiss on her fingers before pulling his car to a stop at a red light, where his eyes locked with hers as he said, “You’re amazing, Lucy.”

The usual warmth crept up her cheeks as she tried but failed to press back her shy smile. Her hand reached for his chest, resting right over his beating heart. Her touch was so gentle that it sent Xandar to a blissful paradise; so assuring that he’d never felt more at peace; and so warm that he had never felt more loved.

As Lucianne felt her husband’s emotions, she whispered, “Try to...really feel your animal in new situations with new creatures, Xandar. Trust what you feel. It’ll hardly ever be wrong. I doubt it was wrong very often in your past.”

Xandar leaned in and pecked a kiss on her temple before Lucianne pushed him back to his seat when she noticed the lights turned green. Xandar chuckled as he said, “Now that I think about it, I did always have the urge to scratch the Kyltons’ faces whenever either one of them spoke, especially when my late parents forced me to sit through a few hours of nonsensical chit chat with them.”

“There you go!” Lucianne leaned back into her seat with a satisfied smile like she just completed a task.

A cheeky glint appeared in Xandar’s eyes when he said, “So, that means I should’ve scratched their faces at that time. It would’ve saved us a whole lot of trouble.”

He felt his wife’s sudden urgency to retort through their bond, but when Lucianne opened her mouth with the intention to protest, she paused and pondered on what she just heard. Lucianne’s urge to fight him diminished before it was replaced by concurrence. She smirked and said, “Well played, My King. Well played.”

“So you agree?” Xandar asked, excited that this was one of the rare occasions that he could successfully persuade his wife that spontaneous violence was the right way forward.



"I'm not supposed to," Lucianne was finding it hard to press back her smile.

"But you do."

"Let's just say that, as queen, I don't agree."

Xandar laughed out loud before he said, "Oh c'mon, babe. You can't deny your animal's instinct."

"You're right, just as my animal can't deny my logic and rationality. We coexist to balance out each other."

Xandar shook his head slowly at her clever reb.uttal before he sighed and said, "Lucy, you are amazingly frightening and incredibly se.xy when you're inhumane. You really don't have to restrain yourself from being merciless sometimes."

"I don't, Xandar. I just...want violence to be the last resort, that's all."

"Because you're the queen?" Xandar teased.

"Because I believe in second chances," Lucianne answered simply. "Some creatures do change for the better. I'm not just talking about Greg. I've seen so many before him making that change. Tate, Lovelace, Raden, and numerous others from so many packs."

She paused when a thought came to her as she murmured, "Our animal's intuition is great to gauge how careful we ought to be in the present. But the downside of it is that it can't sense if a creature is capable of changing. It can only detect the energies and intentions at a given time. If we act on it without letting time show us that someone is capable of being...better, we might be prematurely eliminating a possible ally, and destroying a possible relationship that could blossom into a lifelong friendship. As much as I trust my animal's instinct, I also trust my own logic and intuition that's more inclined to consider future possibilities."

Xander took this in before he asked in all seriousness, "You're saying you considered that Greg...could change?"

"Honestly, no. Greg's case was very unexpected. If I were being honest, I thought I'd k!!! him myself before the end of the collaboration last year."

“What changed?”

“He did. He committed a long list of heinous acts in the past, Xandar, but despite the difficulties he’d face in coming forward, despite the losses he’d suffer by giving himself up, he still chose to do it. That doesn’t only take courage, it takes an insane amount of humility. You heard what he said about him never making empty threats to keep his reputation intact. His reputation had been compromised in the rogue world the moment he chose to side with the government. But he did it anyway.”

“And we both know why he did what he did,” Xandar muttered in dissatisfaction before he stopped at another traffic light and pecked a kiss on her lips. He stared intensely into her eyes as he whispered in a deep voice, “I do trust you, baby. And I know you’ll be with me despite how Greg feels but it’s just really...agitating when he looks at you like that.”

Lucianne’s eyes narrowed when she said, “I hope you see the irony here, dearest. You’re not the one who has to resist scratching someone’s eyes out every time we go shopping.”

“What do you mean?” Xandar started driving again.

Seeing that her husband was genuinely lost, she asked in disbelief, “You didn’t feel my annoyance on those trips?”

Their conversation paused when their convoy came to a steady halt at the far end of town with no soul in sight, only ruins from abandoned construction projects. It was so quiet and dusty that it felt eerie. Greg pressed open a tiny compartment on his steering wheel, and tapped on the small red button there twice. Paused. Tapped another three times. Pause. And twice again. His phone screen lit up, the device echoing in a robotic voice, “Requesting voice recognition.”

Greg uttered in a commanding tone, “Make sure everyone is in the lounge. Be ready to greet the queen.” His systems were programmed to recognize his voice but the added feature sent out instructions if he urgently required any of his people’s presence.

The same robotic voice responded, “Identity confirmed. Welcome home, Your Grace.”

Greg continued driving forward as Xandar, Laurent and the others started wondering whether they were driving right into a trap.

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Right before Xandar was about to say something, large metal floor panels covered by sand and rusty construction materials folded upwards to reveal a route which seemed to lead to an underground tunnel. They followed Greg's car and came to a well-lit parking space. As soon as Laurent and his followers were in, Greg shut the panels.

After Xandar parked in a random lot, he turned to his wife and asked, "Weren't you only annoyed on those shopping trips because the books, clothes or shoes weren't to your taste?"

Lucianne furrowed her brows and exclaimed with elaborated hand gestures, "Are you kidding me, Xandar?! You want to talk about shopping when your cousin just opened a freaki—"

"Yeah yeah, that was all very impressive but really, baby, it wasn't the material things that bothered you on those trips?"

She decided to just go with what her husband wanted to talk about for now. "No! Seriously, Xandar?! How could you not see some of the sales staff, cashiers, waitresses and female customers look at you like they would gladly submit to you as and when you please?!"

He pecked a kiss on her nose to calm her increasing agitation before explaining in defense, "Forgive me, my little freesia. I was preoccupied with trying to subtly scare off any man looking at my wife like I wasn't right next to her. And can I just say that I have it way worse? Even the little boys seem to be so mesmerized by your beauty that the toys in their hands don't seem to be able to hold their attention."

Lucianne calmed down a little after Xandar's kiss, and her mood improved further because she still found it amusing that Xandar had the tendency to be jealous of little boys, so she reached out to stroke his shoulder as she said, "Don't worry, my indecent beast. I'll only reciprocate Russell's attention."

Xandar's blissful eyes widened in shock as his smile fell. Lucianne dashed out of the car with a cheeky grin, and closed the door behind her which effectively cut her mate off when he was exclaiming, "WHA—"

When Xandar got out, he heard Lucianne saying, "Lead the way, Your Grace."

Greg nodded with a small smile and started walking towards a white wall. Xandar was at Lucianne's side in an instant, and with his arm around her waist, he murmured, "You didn't play fair, sweetheart."

"How do you think I almost always win, darling?" Lucianne responded with the same cheeky smile which pulled at Xandar's heartstrings, making him give into his urge to squeeze the flesh at her waist before kissing her temple.

From afar, the white wall in the underground parking space looked like any normal wall. Up close, there was a row of very subtle, minute, vertical lines, like they were carved there for decorative purposes. Greg didn't even need to count from the far left to know which line was the fifty-second one, and he inserted his car key into that line before giving it a twist. He pulled the key back out, and the wall raised.

So, it wasn't a wall. But a concrete roller shutter.

Lucianne's eyes widened in wonder and awe at the sight of the wall rising up, which was when Desmond exclaimed, "Ain't that cool, queen?!"

Greg threw a disapproving glare at Desmond, and made a mental note to talk to him about basic, incredibly basic, formalities soon. Desmond was still grinning in Lucianne's way when she said, "Very cool." The awe in her tone soothed Greg's irritation. He could almost picture the shine in her eyes, and it took a lot of restraint to not turn around and start staring at her.

Laurent and the other policemen were still wary. But Alissa, Hailey and Ivory smiled at Lucianne's words. They could see how their boss fell for her. The queen was so...real, expressive and open-minded for a royal. And they could tell that, when they spoke to her about their pasts, she wasn't just listening out of duty, sympathy or with the intention to judge. They felt her sincerity, and she listened with the intention to understand and feel their plight, making them feel heard and less...alone.

Behind the cement roller shutter was motion-detection glass doors that opened to each side as they stepped into another space with beige-tiled floors. A small, black-colored cubical device was right in the middle of another white wall with a mahogany door at the far right. After Greg punched in a twelve-digit code on the cubicle device, the device scanned his retina before the door opened with a click.

Lucianne's smile was evident when she exclaimed in a hushed, excited tone, "So cool!"

Xandar loved seeing her being a curious cat, but maybe not when it came to this cousin's stuff. He pecked a kiss on her temple to remind her that he loved her so much that he would give her anything, and if this extensive security system was what she wanted, then he would make it happen.

Greg finally allowed himself to look at Lucianne before he gestured at the door which his people just went through as he said with a warm smile, "After you, My Queen."

As she approached the entrance, Xandar mind-linked her, asking her if this was what she wanted for themselves. She looked at her husband with narrowed eyes and linked firmly, 'Darling, we don't need this system. We're not being shunned from society or hunted down by the authorities. I like it, but it doesn't mean I want it.'

He smiled and pecked another kiss on her temple before responding with a simple, "Okay."

The moment Lucianne stepped through the door with Xandar by her side, she froze at the sight in front of her. Ninety-four lycans in the large-spaced lounge were down on one knee with their heads hung low as they echoed in firm synchronicity, "My Queen."

Greg's voice echoed through the lounge, "And her mate, too."

Some of them raised their heads to glance at Xandar before they all muttered with blatant reluctance, "Your Highness."

Lucianne slid an arm around her husband's biceps as her thumb stroked his skin in slow, soothing motions. Any ordinary creature could feel the chill in that greeting. They didn't even want to acknowledge Xandar as their king, only greeting him by royal address.

Lucianne tried not to let the surroundings go quiet for too long, so she smiled at everyone and said, "Rise. All of you."

When they did, most were already throwing her smiles because of whatever Ivory and the others linked them on the way to the Den. Lucianne then added, "Don't take this the wrong way, but please don't do that again. I'm quite fine with a smile and a wave, or a simple handshake, really."

Surprisingly, all eyes moved to Greg, who pressed back a smile and uttered with a firm nod, "As you wish, My Queen."

Lucianne smiled politely in return. "Thank you, Your Grace."

Suddenly, a familiar ringtone filled the quiet space. Lucianne's eyes widened in shock and embarrassment before she rummaged through the things in her bag to look for her phone.

The lit screen read: Pelly

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Lucianne shoved aside the thoughts of how good the reception was underground as she turned around to pick up the empress's call.

"Pelly?"

The response came out ominously, "Aunt Lucy, there's been another abduction. Twenty adults and two children have been taken from another village, Saber Vagary."

Lucianne's facial expression squinted in despair before she asked, "How far was this from the Falling Vines?"

"23 miles north."

"Without bloodshed?"

"Without bloodshed," Pellethia confirmed, and added, "We're still here, and everything seems the same. Lycan and werewolf scents, which, we're positive, would fade away to reveal the real proditors that were here. The prints are like the last time as well – some real, some fake."

“Have your trackers managed to follow the trail from the last abduction?”

“Maddock sent sixteen vigils after your visit, but the trail was lost before they recovered any further clues. They’ve been suspended since then, and Maddock has been stripped of his title.”

Lucianne blinked repeatedly before she found her voice again and asked, “I’m sorry, what?”

She suspended sixteen vigils and a viscount?! Well, now a former-viscount. The vigil-suspension came as a shock because vigils were not just policemen, but high-ranking investigative officers who were talentedly-skilled and trustworthy figures, loyal only to the imperial family. A vampire had to have served for at least a century AND done some form of noble work to even be considered for this exclusive club.

Pellethia couldn’t fathom how what she said was hard to understand, but she responded nonetheless, “Octavia and I suspended Maddock for a week, along with those he sent who came back with nothing but an apology.”

“Don’t you only have thirty-two vigils in your empire, Pelly?” Lucianne had been reading up on everything about vampires since the empress’s first email. She remembered this fact easily since she found being a vigil to be her dream job if she were a vampire.

“That’s right. The suspension ought to keep the remaining half on their toes.”

Lucianne reminded herself that Pellethia had been ruling for centuries, so she would know what she was doing, and chose to ask, “Did the suspended ones find anything? Anything at all?”

“They followed the trail from Falling Vines towards the south, where the weather wasn’t as sunny. Crossed over three rivers. Ran through a forest and an abandoned castle.”

The castle got Lucianne thinking. “So, they went inside the castle?”

“Yes, they followed the trail through a broken front window, went to the second floor, and the scent was strongest at another window on that floor, which faces the second forest, the Forest of Oderem. Once they took two steps in, the trail was, understandably, lost.”

Lucianne knew about the Forest of Oderem, too. It was an ancient, scent-confusing place. The forest itself produces its own odors that could be from anything as wonderful as a field of flowers, as delicious as freshly-baked pastries, or as foul as decomposed bodies.

It was grown by Count Dracula, who paid a witch for enchanted seeds that eventually grew into this forest. Dracula either brought the man he 'owned' in there for private moments, or lured his enemies into the forest before using the confusing scents to lure them deeper in and ultimately killing them and feeding on their blood. It was a nightmare for the authorities but a dream come true for proditors seeking an escape route.

Pellethia then said with a snarl, "That forest should have been burned a long time ago."

"Pelly, we both know why no one can do that," Lucianne said.

Many emperors had tried to get rid of the Forest of Oderem in some way, but their attempts were not only futile, it was a guaranteed way to suffer from some kind of misfortune. Some emperors who tried had their closest confidantes fall ill from unknown illnesses and die a painfully-slow death; some lost their spouses; others even lost their only child, their heir, effectively ending their ruling bloodline.

After some thinking, Lucianne said, "How about this, Pelly? Let Xandar and I meet the suspended ones. They might have seen more than they know."

A pause, and Pellethia's voice came out with visible relief when she replied, "That would be wonderful, Aunt Lucy. When?"

"I'm a little occupied with one of our teams here right now, so...tomorrow evening?"

"Okay, we'll get them ready."

"Thanks, Pelly."

Her tone came out more cheerful when she said, "Thanks for helping us with this, Aunt Lucy. Send mine and Octavia's love to Uncle Xandar."



Lucianne chuckled. "Will do. See you soon."

After hanging up and heaving a sigh, she returned to her husband's side and told him and Greg everything. Xandar's thumb on her shoulder started drawing comforting circles as he felt the frustration with her.

When Lucianne finished speaking, Greg questioned in disbelief, "Isn't the Forest of Oderem like any normal forest, My Queen? The thing about fake scents is merely a fairytale spun by some author to teach children to avoid wandering into unknown places exuding delightful scents, isn't it?"

Fairytale? Where did that come from? Xandar's eyebrows furrowed in confusion for a brief second before he realized that Greg remembered the enchanted forest from a children's bedtime storybook, and he snorted before burying the bottom half of his face in Lucianne's hair to hide the teasing smirk and chuckles.

Lucianne touched her husband's arm as she spoke in Greg's defense, "Darling, be nice. It really does exist in a fairytale book before we all learned it in school."

When the king managed to compose himself, an amusing smile was still visible when he commented not too loudly, "Greg, I knew you were bad at history but I didn't think you were this bad. Goddess, a fairytale."

Although only Greg's top four could hear what Xandar said, Greg was still embarrassed that his weakest subject back in school was disclosed in front of Lucianne, so he argued in defense, "To be fair, cousin, that subject had been nothing but a nuisance. What's with the mandatory requirement about needing to take history, forcing us to know every little thing about the past? It's in the f\*cking past! Leave the damn thing there and move the hell on!"

"Darling, seriously, stop." Lucianne pleaded as Xandar continued trying to hold back his chuckles. She was neither smiling nor laughing at that moment but Xandar's burst of humor through their mate-bond was making it harder for her to fight the urge to laugh with him.

She then looked at the slightly red-faced Greg and spoke with as much composure as he could manage, "I'd like to meet everyone, Your Grace. Shall we start with the introductions?"

“Of course. Right this way, my Queen.” Greg responded instantly with gratitude as he gestured her to the first lycan on his left.

The fact that Lucianne was speaking to Greg replaced Xandar’s humor with possessiveness, making him hold his wife close as they approached the first lycan. Lucianne and Xandar spent the next few hours shaking hands and getting a brief background on the ninety-four lycans, who were pleased to meet her, but who still showed some resistance towards Xandar despite Lucianne’s attempts to let them know that he helped her argue for pardon to be granted.

Like Greg, they knew where the true power lay, and they felt that it was with her because their lives were stuck in a rut until she came along. Pardon was in the law for aesthetic purposes. It was almost never granted. If any police, warrior or king heard about them living in the shadows, they would never be in a position to bargain once they were found.

Some of them were skeptical when they heard that Greg was surrendering their presence at first, but now that they’d met the queen, they couldn’t help but concur that they would have done the same thing if they were Greg. The queen might not admit to have vetoed anything in the meeting when pardon was discussed, but her presence brought a change, not just in their boss but also in the kingdom. She was giving them a chance they never got from anyone else but Greg.

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0 5 minutes read

When the introductions were done, Xandar and Lucianne followed Greg through a cream-colored corridor which had so many turns that it felt like they were in a maze. There were doors the whole way in but some were actually red herrings – certain doors open up to walls, not rooms. This was a precaution taken to buy time to escape, if they were ever found.

They finally entered a room with the same cream walls with a rectangular glass table placed in the middle. What was odd about this room was that there were no office chairs. Not one.

After those who followed the royals from the police station entered, Hailey closed the door. Greg placed his palm flat on the table. A faint blue glow scanned his handprint horizontally, vertically and around the shape of his

palm before the blue words “ACCESS GRANTED” appeared in the middle of the table.

Lucianne’s eyes widened in awe again as Greg tapped on a button that was so subtle that one couldn’t see it because it looked like it was part of the glass. A clear hologram appeared right in the middle, floating right above the table. And Xandar started getting insecure when he felt Lucianne’s awe over his cousin’s highly-advanced technological devices.

The duke opened up a map of all territories, zooming in just enough to identify the inhabitants around Falling Vines and Saber Vagary. Deputy Chief Laurent spoke, “As impressive as this is, Your Grace, why are we looking at a map that can be found in any stationery store?”

Greg’s tapping pause at that remark before he continued tapping as he asked rhetorically, “Do all maps in stationery stores show this?”

Red and green dots appeared everywhere on the hologram in different densities. Lucianne’s legs developed a mind of their own, and she gently detached herself from Xandar’s hold, taking slow steps to get a better view of the dots.

She studied the color pattern with wide, analytical eyes, and wasn’t aware that she was only two steps behind Greg’s left shoulder, a little too close for her husband’s comfort. Xandar stood a half a meter from his cousin before pulling Lucianne to stand in front of him as his arms gently wrapped around her shoulders and abdomen from behind just to make sure she stayed where she belonged, in his arms.

Suddenly, Lucianne started muttering to herself, “Green ones are the wolves. That’s the Lone Light Pack, and then moving south, Misty Dawn and Cold River. The red ones,” her head c0cked to one side as she studied the two measly red dots in wolf territory on the hologram. Greg waited for her to figure it out as he stole a glimpse of her beautiful thinking face.

Lucianne eventually guessed, “Probably rogues.”

Desmond’s excited voice came from the corner, “Damn, the queen’s good!”

Greg smirked as he said, “It’s funny how you’re still surprised, Desmond.”

“I ain’t surprised, boss. Just celeb.ratin’ that, for once, a royal is smart AND ain’t judgy.”

Greg’s sharp eyes zoned-in on Desmond when he asked in a low voice, sounding somewhat offended, “And what the hell does that mean?”

Hailey patted Desmond on his shoulder as she pressed back a smile. Ivory looked at him and shook his head with a ‘you’re doomed’ expression. Desmond then explained as cheerfully as he could, “Boss, I love ya. But ya gotta admit. Ya’re judgy. Ya’re smart. But reeaally judgy.”

Xandar swallowed the enthusiastic agreement he had in the name of ‘being nice to his cousin’, but Lucianne chuckled lightly at Desmond’s remark. And because of that, any venomous words Greg was going to spit at Desmond couldn’t come out through his parted lips when he got lost in that melodious sound. Desmond glanced at Lucianne and then back at Greg’s softened features, suspecting that the queen might have just saved him from his own boss.

Greg smirked at the former Money Retriever, and said, “You got lucky today, Desmond.”

When Xandar’s grip around Lucianne’s abdomen tightened, Lucianne started stroking his strong arm with her thumb as she asked, “Is it safe to say that the red dots come and go, Your Grace?”

Greg’s eyes continued to fix on the screen as he said, “Yes, My Queen. But this is not recorded in real time. My followers scout sites like these once a week, or once in two to three weeks depending on the popularity of a particular location for rogue inhabitation and activity. This was updated two days ago, so perhaps w—”

Xandar’s eyebrows furrowed when he cut Greg off with a question, “Does this mean you knew where Kylton’s third supplier was this whole time?”

The cousins locked eyes, as the duke admitted in a dead tone, “Yes.”

Xandar’s tone turned homicidal when he prompted, “And you didn’t mention this because?”

“Because they’re also my supplier. Without them and their products, my followers would have no jobs, no money, and no life. I have legitimate

businesses but it isn't enough to sustain ninety-eight creatures and the security measures required to keep them safe. There's also the fact that most of my people don't like being dormant. Selling, transporting and trafficking the supplied goods were the only ways to make an income and not die of hunger and boredom. You already had the suppliers you needed to do what you wanted to do with the Kyltons and ex-ministers. You didn't need this last one, cousin." Greg spat the last word with intense hate that he didn't bother to mask.

Lucianne's voice suddenly cut through the tense atmosphere, "Just out of curiosity, Your Grace, is that supplier also made up of previously-convicted felons by some...error on the justice system's part?"

The duke's eyes softened but he felt guilty for keeping this information from Lucianne, so he avoided her gaze as he answered, "You could say that, My Queen. The reason they're there as suppliers, and not here with us, is because it's safer for them to be there."

"What do you mean, Your Grace?"

Greg slowly met her curious orbs, and after taking a breath to steady himself, he explained, "It's more risky to be on the field, My Queen, be it as transporters or traffickers. Moving about without raising suspicions is not a skill that's easily mastered by all. Those in the supply department either lack the talent, or have a family so they themselves cannot risk getting caught."

Lucianne processed this before she asked uneasily, "So...unlike Ivory's situation where his mate is NOT associated with him in formal documents, the suppliers are rogues as spouses?"

Greg nodded in confirmation before he added, "And some have rogue children, My Queen. No parent wants their kids to end up in an orphanage, brought up by creatures who'll tell them that their parents are traitors who never cared what happened to them."

Lucianne instinctively glanced at Alissa, whose eyes fixed on the ground as she stared into space, no doubt thinking about her triplets again.

Xandar turned Lucianne around. His hard gaze penetrated into her eyes when he mind-linked her, 'Baby, there comes a point where we need to draw a line in this.'

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Xandar continued linking, 'He knew where the third supplier was but didn't tell us.'

'Can you blame him?' Lucianne retorted.

A pause. Xandar linked in disbelief, 'You're taking his side?'

'No, Xandar,' That simmered down some of his rage as Lucianne continued, 'I'm taking the side of whichever creature has been scarred for life because of ONE legally punishable act that the law says they committed, which might not even be wholly their fault to begin with. If they're wrong, sure, punish them. But there's an endpoint in making them carry the blame that is, sadly, not practiced in this kingdom. We have to change that.'

'And we will. But Greg can't be exempted from further punishment. He kept this information to himself despite knowing that we were hunting down the rogue suppliers. It's like he was laughing at us behind bars while we were on a wild goose chase!'

'He kept that to himself for the sake of his people, Xandar. And he could've lied when you asked him that, you know? Why do you think he didn't?'

When her husband stayed silent, Lucianne pointed out the obvious, 'He's learning to trust us, Xandar, to trust you. He's helping us. He could've left us fending for ourselves. Look at him. Look at his followers. Do you think they have anything to gain from helping the government? Do you think they wouldn't have been fine and safe on their own? From the way I see it, they didn't need the pardon to continue staying alive. This current situation is a gamble for them. They're putting their lives at risk to help us with this new threat. They could have gone on minding their own business and let the concoction happen, watching from the sidelines while the rest of us struggled to fight off those trying to challenge my Authority. They stepped up WITHOUT being asked, BEFORE we knew about the threat. We don't have the bargaining power to draw any lines with them.'

'So, you're just going to let him get away with everything? It doesn't matter to you that Dalloway, Christian and I, even you on some occasions, have been popping around random parts of the kingdom because we were hunting down the very creatures that HE had been hiding from us?!' Xandar's eyes

darkened, and his breathing got heavy. His animal was nowhere calm either, snarling in agreement with its human part.

Lucianne's breathing got heavy too when she linked back with fierce eyes, 'Why is it so hard for you to understand that they are only hidden because the systems we defend are oppressive to them? How would you feel if I were a rogue?'

'You're NOTHING like them, Lucy.'

'That much is clear. After listening to their stories, I dare say I got really lucky with life. But if I didn't get so lucky, if I somehow attempted to murder one of my past mates, and the law convicted me for that, putting me behind bars. And upon my release after serving the sentence, my only form of survival IS to go rogue, and I somehow find the resources and make the connections to help build a place like this. Would you draw the line with me when I decided to help you with what I've learned and helped build?'

Xandar's grip was already tightening with each word. It was painful to picture Lucianne being punished and put behind bars like that, having to find a way back up all on her own when the whole of society was against her. Despite his watered eyes, his stare was still hard when he declared aloud in a deep, firm voice, "I would NEVER do that to you, Lucy. And I will never let anything close to that happen to you. Ever."

In an adamant, angered-whisper, she challenged, "Then why is this situation now any different?"

Xandar was racking his brain for something as his thumbs stroked Lucianne's cheeks just to assure himself that she was right there in front of him, and not behind bars or wandering about as a rogue somewhere, struggling to survive. A moment of silence passed before Lucianne suggested through their link, 'How about we get to the bottom of things first, then decide if certain...past actions have to be...reviewed, balancing them with the right actions they're taking now? If we scrutinized every past wrong every step of the way, we'd be wasting time that we clearly don't have.'

Xandar sighed in defeat before pressing a kiss on her forehead that sent a shower of sparks throughout her entire being before he muttered, "Fine."

Lucianne pecked a kiss on Xandar's cheek before turning back to Greg. She was about to say something before she noticed the duke's eyes were glazed over.

'Boss, we've pinpointed J.J. and Bundy,' Quinn reported.

'Where?'

'They came out of Halo's place at 1 am, got into a car, drove for six hours, and checked-in in Vent's 24-hour inn. I hacked into the inn's system. It's for a two-day-one-night stay. Should we continue watching them?'

'No. That's enough information to go on for now. Halo and Vent's underground passageways lead to very specific territories.' After some thinking, Greg instructed, 'Get Nani to monitor the end of Halo's. Ask Taron to do the same for Vent's. Any word on Dormant Little Red?'

'Lepak is watching him, but he said Red looks more like he's trying to...act dormant.'

'Same bar, same drink, same solitude?'

'Yes, boss. Proceed or drop watch on this one?'

'Proceed, but get Lepak to swap with someone else. We don't want Red suspecting anything before we know what his game is.'

'As you wish, Your Grace.'

Greg ended the link, turned, and found Lucianne skillfully pinching and enlarging the hologram like a pro, not knowing that when Lucianne first touched it without knowing how it worked, the hologram disappeared and she panicked before Ivory and Alissa helped her set it up again, and taught her how to use it while Greg was mind-linking.

Xandar was already smiling again because he found her panicked demeanor to be absolutely adorable and irresistible, and it was amazing that Lucianne knew how to work the hologram with just a few basic tips.

Greg allowed himself a brief look of the queen before his eyes went to the hologram. She was looking into vampire territory, the Forest of Oderem, to be precise.



Greg muttered to himself without thinking, "Why didn't they just station guards around the perimeter at all times?"

Without taking her eyes off the hologram, she explained simply, "Because if the forest senses creatures around it for an extended period of time, it'll produce an odor that can adversely affect a vampire's immune system."

That got Greg thinking. "It'll ONLY affect a vampire's system, My Queen?"

Lucianne blinked in realization. Xandar caught up too. With firm eyes fixed on her cousin-in-law, Lucianne said, "We're not putting anyone there, Your Grace. We don't know if it'll affect our species."

"Well, I'm not suggesting putting the warriors or police, but maybe a few prisoners to experiment?" Greg urged.

Lucianne's eyebrows furrowed further when she said, "No."

Xandar spoke all of a sudden, "I wonder if Kelissa Kylton's screaming would scare or annoy the forest into telling us where the abductors went."

Greg was on the same page with Xandar for once. "Maybe her nauseating scent could rival the scents of the forest and magically tear it down."

Lucianne b.uttet in, "Your Grace, we're talking about a forest that can produce and replicate ALL scents. And I highly doubt Kelissa's odor would scare anything." Her sights shifted to Xandar when she uttered, "Darling, your history mind knows that screaming at an enchanted forest is NOT a solution!"

"I'm not sure, babe. It's enchanted. Anything can happen, don't you think? If the books are right about the trees being, in a way, more alive than normal trees, then they would experience some form of emotions: anger, annoyance."

Greg was staring at the table as he muttered, "That actually doesn't sound stupid." He continued suggesting, "Maybe one could throw in a few rogue wolves and, for lycans, throw in the Kyltons, Tanners and Aphaels, maybe even those arrested in Wu Bi Corp. That ought to make a large-enough sample size for more accurate findings. The prisons holding those idiots might be getting a little too crowded anyway."

Xandar added, “Besides, some of them have been sentenced to life imprisonment. This really wouldn’t make a difference. If the forest does kill them, then they would be given a shorter way to death.”

Lucianne looked at her husband when she countered, “And if the forest doesn’t kill them and gets annoyed, don’t you think the curse of tampering with it would affect one of us or the people we love? Don’t you think it’ll affect Reida?” The mention of their daughter pulled Xandar’s mind to a halt.

Greg’s thought process slowed down a little but picked up again. “Well, it’s not tampering with the forest per se, My Queen. There’s no deceit. We’re just curious about how it works. It’s just a simple experiment to...understand it. Perhaps the forest might even feel flattered.”

Lucianne’s rage at the absurdity continued to boil. And just when she was about to explode, Tate’s link came in to tell her that they had just picked up the rogues, effectively saving the two cousins from her wrath.

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0 5 minutes read

Lucianne’s eyes cleared to find Xandar holding her to his chest and drawing comforting circles on her back shoulder, soothing her earlier inferno. She parted their bodies and looked him dead in the eye as she said firmly, “We are NOT putting anyone in the kingdom around the Forest of Oderem.”

Xandar blinked as he thought about what she said before suggesting with a cheeky smile, “Well, we could put them IN the forest instead, it’ll b—”

“XANDAR!”

Xandar chuckled and pecked a kiss on her forehead before assuring her with a smile as he stroked her forearms to soothe her, “Okay, okay. Until we know more about the forest, we’ll keep the experiments in our mental archive.” Another kiss on her cheek before he muttered, “Over-responsible Queen.”

Lucianne sighed with relief, and turned, only to have a still-thinking Greg say, “Instead of lycans and werewolves, I suppose I could get a few willing humans to exper—”

“NO!” Lucianne exclaimed even before he finished.

Her volume and ferocity made Greg and his animal raise their hands in surrender as Greg uttered in a little fear, "Alright, alright. Point taken, My Queen. I'll stop here."

Desmond and the others were subtly chuckling at their boss. Greg had never shown fear in any situation. He would be worried on certain occasions, but fear was not a word they'd associate their boss with. He actually looked comical.

Lucianne heaved another heavy sigh and composed herself before her tone returned to normal when she looked back at the hologram, adjusting the scope to show wolf territory as she said, "So, the red dots are our next points of attack, Your Grace?"

The duke's hands lowered, and he explained, "Well, I wouldn't say that, My Queen. No all rogues are lethal. These," he tapped on one of the red dots, and the screen enlarged to show a detailed assessment of the population before he continued, "...are definitely harmless."

"How can you tell, Your Grace?" Laurent asked.

Xandar and Lucianne were studying the details of the population:

Brown (Light): 1 male

Brown (Dark): 1 female

Grey: 2 males; 1 female

Black: 0

White: 0

Others: 0

Total: 5

Greg tried not to sound too exasperated as he answered, "One, the 'others' category is nil, meaning that they're normal wolves without any of those legendary special abilities. And if you remember basic science, deputy, you'd know that black-furred animals are known to be more rebellious or ambitious, or both, thus dangerous, so their absence is something to be happy about. Three, no white wolves, which are generally known to either be harmless or

only look harmless but are quite the opposite. No offense intended, My Queen.”

“None taken,” Lucianne muttered with a slight shake of her head, and actually felt flattered by that generalization.

Xandar then said, “Basic science also taught us that creatures with light brown fur are known to be scheming or secretive, or both. What makes you think that one won’t be a problem, Greg?”

Greg’s eyebrows raised as he took slight offense because his own animal had light brown fur, and Xandar’s question could advance into whether Greg himself would be ‘a problem’. His gaze was fixed on his cousin as he tried to decipher whether Xandar was pushing his buttons or genuinely asking a question.

Lucianne gently touched her husband’s chest and prompted, “No offense intended, right, My King?”

Xandar tore his eyes away from Greg, pecked a kiss on his wife’s temple before whispering obediently with a smile, “Of course not, My Queen.”

Despite still being suspicious, Greg began, “It’s not a problem because the light brown one is the leader, and there wouldn’t be a point in scheming or being secretive to his own followers. It’ll only disrupt the peace and efficiency of his own pack.”

Dark brown wolves were, to Greg, ‘mindless followers’ until, if they got lucky (or unlucky), a life experience wakes them up and shakes them so hard that they start developing a spine and a mind of their own.

As for grey wolves, well...

“This next pack,” Greg tapped on the second red dot, which showed only two grey wolves, and he continued, “...is probably more harmful to themselves than to us.”

Lucianne muttered, “Emotional codependents.”

Greg nodded.

Generally, grey-furred creatures have trouble monitoring and controlling their emotions, hence are easily triggered, and would go berserk and attack for physical and emotional self-defense. Due to their emotional instability and poor judgment thereof, grey wolves rarely run with other grey wolves, unless one of them had already learned to control their emotions and lead the still-unstable one; or these two were attracted to one another due to their mutual emotional instability, because they felt that no one else but this companion understood what they were going through or how they feel.

But one wrong word or the slightest hint of indifference shown by their travelling partner and they'd attack each other from feeling betrayed and abandoned, even if it was just a misunderstanding.

Greg said, "Our first step should be to make sure that the abductors and abductees aren't in wolf and lycan territories, so that we can confidently blame the bl00ds.uickers' inefficiency and poor handling of the issue if it ever came down to it. We'd be able to a.ssert that it was beyond any of our jurisdictions to do anything from our end."

Lucianne had to press her lips shut to avoid spending the next few minutes protesting against blame-shifting. She also didn't want to break Greg's flow.

The duke took her silence as the green light to proceed, "To search our territories, the best point to start at would be here," he pointed at the hologram and continued, "What I suspect, My Queen, is that IF the vampires and three lycans from the first village did bring the abductees into wolf territory, these would be the rogues to ask. If they didn't see anything, then the abductees never entered wolf territory."

One of the policemen questioned, "Why not just ask those packs there then?"

"Because," Lucianne continued to think out loud, "The rogues are nearer to the border than the wolf packs are, and if the packs had seen any rogue lycans, we, as the authorities, would have been alerted by now."

Greg looked at his cousin and spoke with zero humor, "You know, cousin, it really baffles me how you haven't demoted yourself to a position of a prince or a duke...or anything less than the supreme ruling status yet."

Lucianne shot Greg a sharp glare. The police were about to protest in their king's defense before Xandar's raised hand stopped them as he said, "It's

fine. It just means that the queen is better at this than I am, which is true. This is just habitual bickering between me and this duke.”

Lucianne was proud that Xandar was being the better man by refusing to escalate the bickering, so she whispered to him affectionately as her thumb stroked his shoulder, “You’re catching up just fine, darling.”

“No, he isn’t,” Greg muttered.

“Your Grace,” Lucianne spoke in a warning tone and glare.

He raised his hands at chest level in surrender and took a step back as he said, “Be nice, I remember. Point taken, My Queen. Anyway, if they saw no rogue lycans, then it’s definitely good news.”

Lucianne blinked at his assertion. “Is it? Why?”

Greg explained matter-of-factly, “It just means that the rogues used hidden passageways instead of the direct routes.”

“And that’s good news because?” Deputy Chief Laurent prompted, failing to understand how ‘hidden’ passageways were any better.

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05 minutes read

Greg didn’t answer the deputy. His sights fixed on Lucianne, giving her time to figure it out because he knew, without a doubt, that she could. Lucianne was pondering deeply before her sights went back to the hologram. She pinched the screen to reveal the whole werewolf and lycan territory. Her eyes squinted slightly to see if there was anything underneath the familiar geographical area everyone was familiar with.

Greg came over to tap on the ‘routes’ icon, and hundreds of red lines appeared on the hologram that Lucianne took a shocked breath as she stared blankly at what she was seeing, taking a step back to get a fuller view.

Greg murmured, “It’s good news because the underground territories connected by those hidden passageways are limited. If no one saw them aboveground, then the search should expand underground. If they’re not there, they’re not in lycan or wolf territories.”

Laurent suggested, “We could deploy forces to—”

Lucianne immediately said, “No, Laurent. Once they know that we know where they are and who we’re looking for, they’d either heighten security measures, throw in false trails, or even resort to blackmail. Even if they’re not down there, we don’t know if our presence would alert the culprits who may be in the vampire’s territory. It’s too risky. We need to get the vampires back, but risking more lives and alerting the rest of the...rogue population is not the best move to make.”

Alissa uttered, “Exactly why His Grace didn’t let us do it.”

Hailey continued, “Not that our numbers are enough to accomplish such a feat anyway.”

“Yo! Our numbers ‘re enough! It’s the too-many-of-us goin’-‘round-at-the-same-time-and-raisin’-suspicious thing that’s the problem.” Desmond argued.

Greg then said, “Partially correct, Desmond. Because Hailey was right about our numbers. We’re a lot but not enough to look through every underground passageway without getting caught. There are highly sensitive territories here that I won’t consider sending less than twelve of you in phases of two, three or four just to get everyone back here alive. And, of course, the rogues beyond our circle who have been paying attention would recognize some of your faces, so subtlety and anonymity isn’t a luxury you’re entitled to anymore if you entered their turf.”

That got Lucianne thinking. “So...what you’re saying is that it’s better for us, non-rogues, to enter these turfs, using scent sprays to mask our scents?”

The two cousins’ eyes bulged wide open in horror.

Xandar spun her around and lifted her chin gently for their eyes to meet before he spoke in a dangerously low voice, “No. F\*cking. Way. Don’t even think about it, Lucy.”

“It was just a suggestion, darling,” Lucianne responded and looked at him with her wide doe eyes.

Greg also spoke with some anger, “My Queen, the whole point of sharing this with you is so that you’re kept OUT of danger. There’s no way any of us in this room is going to let you anywhere near uncharted waters. It’s too dangerous. Plus, your cover would be blown sooner than you think. Everyone in our world knows your approximate size and recognizes your face.”

Xandar sighed with relief when he heard that, and he pressed his wife into his chest tightly as he muttered, “Thank Goddess.”

Lucianne gently pushed herself away from her protective husband’s embrace and looked at Greg in disbelief, “So, the whole point of sharing this with me is for me to sit back and do nothing?”

Greg scoffed. “I highly doubt you’d be doing nothing, My Queen. Perhaps you could scare the law-abiding vampires a little so that they’re more alert as to who goes in and out of their own territory.”

Lucianne was quizzically-silent for a moment before she stated the obvious, “That’s not within my jurisdiction, Your Grace. And their empress already suspended half of the vigils in existence. What else do you expect her to do?”

“Use the Empress’s Authority is definitely top of my list,” Greg muttered as he opened up a list of names to pick the most suitable followers to get information from the two rogue packs.

“She doesn’t have it,” Lucianne said.

Greg’s finger paused on the hologram. His head turned and asked Lucianne, “She told you that?”

“Yes, and I doubt she’d lie about it. Xandar and I met her in a different lifetime, and we were close then. When she mentioned that she didn’t have that power, I didn’t feel any malice from her energy, only acceptance and some disappointment.”

Xandar added, “Vampire history also supports that only emperors had wielded the Authority in the past, never the empress.”

Greg’s sights went to his cousin. “Lycan history also supports that only kings wielded that power until our queen came along to prove that damn subject wrong.”



“Not true, Greg.” Xandar retorted. “The first to wield the Queen’s Authority was Queen Bellea.”

“I s.uck at history but I remember that this was the one who married a commoner, and this commoner became the only king without an Authority. Their own guards assassinated them in their sleep because no one in that time was ready to kneel before a supreme female ruler.”

Xandar nodded. “That’s the one. And that’s our point. The Queen’s Authority existed for lycans, but there’s no equivalent of that in vampire history.”

“No, cousin. This is the point: like it or not, this is the first time in lycan history that we have someone you’d never expect wielding that power – a woman; a commoner; a former wolf.”

The last description got Xandar thinking, and he muttered to himself, “She started wielding it even when she was still a wolf, actually.”

Greg’s eyebrows raised in surprise. This was news to him.

“That means…” Lucianne began.

Greg managed to get a hold of himself on time to finish for her, “That means the Empress’s Authority can exist, and can start with your bl00ds.ucking-ruler friend, My Queen. But she might need a trigger to get it out.”

“Trigger,” Lucianne repeated in a whisper as she recalled her first time being told that she was emitting her Authority. She was protecting the people she loved. That was the trigger.

Lucianne then continued, “But she’d have to believe that she might have the power first, though. Before Xandar told me I had an Authority, I never channeled it…not to its maximum potential, at least.”

“Great. That’s done.” Greg said.

“Done?” Xandar questioned.

Greg tapped on four of his followers’ names on the hologram, the ones he decided on sending to question the two rogue packs near the border as he responded to Xandar, “The queen is good with creatures, cousin. She’ll be

fine. Let her put that thought into the empress's thick, bloodless skull. If I do it, I might start a war. And I'm sure none of you goody-two-shoes want that."

"Okay. I'll do that," Lucianne muttered in agreement.

Lucianne's eyes glazed over again, and Tate informed her that they were scheduled to land in twenty minutes. Once her eyes cleared, she said, "They're landing soon. We should go meet them."

They left the Cave and headed for the jet hangar. Xandar linked Christian to bring Stella and Reida along and join them there.

At the hangar, Greg and his top four minded their own business. Ivory and Desmond admired the interior while Alissa and Hailey chatted as the former chewed gum. The officers who followed Lucianne and Xandar continued keeping their guard up, just in case the rogues decided to strike.

Christian arrived, carrying Reida with one arm as he threw Greg a disgusted glare while he and Stella made their way to the king and queen. Stella scanned Greg and his people with curious eyes. Due to the distance, she couldn't smell that they were rogues like her. But there was just something oddly familiar about the woman chewing gum.

## **The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 50 - Tips**

0 6 minutes read

Lucianne thanked a smiling Christian when she took her daughter from him and started speaking animatedly in a hushed tone to her little girl. After mind-linking her husband with her large orbs, Xandar glanced at Greg in concern before giving into his little freesia. Lucianne smiled and pecked a grateful kiss on his cheek before approaching Greg with Reida in her arms. Stella stayed with Xandar and Christian, who watched the queen take hasty steps towards the other duke.

Ivory and Desmond stopped looking around; Hailey stopped talking; and Alissa's gum-chewing came to an awkward pause, but no one was as shocked as Greg was.

When Lucianne was right in front of Greg, she positioned Reida to face him as she spoke to her, "Reida, this is Uncle Greg. Want to say 'hi'?"

Reida looked at Greg with wide lilac eyes, and like she was trained, gave Greg a little wave before her mother cooed 'good girl'. Greg had long accepted that it was going to be difficult to see Lucianne with her child because it was not made with him, but the fact that she told her daughter he was her uncle made him feel...belonged in his own family, something he'd never felt since his late uncle passed away.

Greg's eyes glistened, and Lucianne thought that she was being insensitive when she introduced her daughter to him, so she hastily apologized, "I am so sorry, Your Grace. This was probably not such a good idea. I had no intention of making you uncomfortable. I am so sorry. I'll just go over there and wait." Lucianne hid her daughter's face in her chest and turned.

But before she took a step, Greg exclaimed, "NO!" His voice echoed through the entire hangar. Xandar had had enough, and dashed to his wife and daughter.

Embarrassment washed over the duke, and Xandar held his wife close to his body as Greg said, "Apologies for my outburst, My Queen. And you didn't make me feel uncomfortable...well, you did at first but not when I was introduced to the princess. I just..." Greg cleared his throat and confessed in a very low volume so that his people couldn't hear what he was about to say, "It's been a long time since someone in the royal family saw me as family."

Xandar started feeling bad, and then conflicted. Greg pretty much asked for the hostile treatment he was given. Xandar and Christian weren't bullies. They both hit a boiling point with Greg before deciding to cut him off government affairs entirely. Greg was lucky that they still allowed him to attend social events and training practice before he was sent to prison!

"Oh, uh..." Lucianne looked at her wide-eyed daughter for a moment before she linked Xandar again, 'Would you mind if Greg...held Reida for a little while?'

His grip on her shoulder tightened instantly, and she got her answer. So, she dropped the subject and the link before she noticed Alissa and the others watching them. "Reida, do you want to meet some new friends?"

With her daughter, Lucianne took slow steps towards the top four, introducing them one by one, and Reida waved to each one of them. Desmond was the most excited one when he said, "Damn, ya're a cutie."

This compliment made Reida's small lips curl into a smile before she chuckled in the most adorable manner and yelled, "F\*ck!"

"Oh dear Goddess," Lucianne muttered in embarrassment.

Greg's brows furrowed in disbelief when he asked, "What did she just say, My Queen?"

It was like Reida understood the question, and she chuckled before yelling again, "F\*ck!"

Lucianne looked at her daughter with stern eyes and said, "Reida," the mother then shook her head slowly as she spoke in a drawn-out manner, "No more using that word, okay? No." The baby's eyes started showing some fear before she cleverly leaned into her mother's chest to avoid having to look at that pair of fierce eyes.

Greg's top four were holding back smiles and chuckles, but Greg was still in shock. Lucianne explained casually, "This is your cousin's fault, Your Grace. He used that word around Reida, and now my child's first word is a curse word."

"Babe, to be fair, it was HIS letter that made me say that word," Xandar then motioned at Greg.

Greg's furious sights went to Alissa. "What the f— What did you write in the message?!"

Alissa's eyes widened the moment that blame was directed to the letter. She immediately clarified, "Nothing in that was a cursed word, Your Grace. I can assure you of that."

Lucianne affirmed what she said by telling Greg, "It wasn't the contents, really. We just knew what a note from you meant."

"Bad news," Christian said the moment he came over and joined the rest with Stella.

Lucianne spoke in Greg's defense, "I wouldn't say that. It was more like...information that we don't expect to get from anywhere else."

No one could argue against the queen because it was true. Every note from Greg to Lucianne was not mere clues, but clear answers that no one else could have given them.

Greg and his people were touched that they were defended, and they started to love Lucianne more than they already did. Hailey was particularly interested in Reida, so when Lucianne asked if she wanted to hold her, Hailey's eyes watered as she held her first child in years since she was held liable for negligence.

Lucianne could tell Hailey was good with children. She held Reida in her arms like it was second nature to her. She didn't struggle to find the right way like those who had never held a baby would.

The sight of a rogue holding the princess was only glaring at first but as the seconds passed, no one saw the labels anymore. It was just a woman holding an infant. That was all there was. Reida then started playing with Hailey's hair, which made Hailey chuckle lightly before she wiped away her own tears.

Even Christian, who was the most skeptical about this whole idea of working with the rogues, had to admit that they were more humane than he had imagined. Xandar went over to his wife, pecked a kiss on her hair before he linked, 'Sweetheart, if you still want to let Greg hold Reida, I'm okay with it.'

Lucianne's glazed-over eyes shot to his own when she asked, 'Are you sure, Xandar?'

Another kiss on her temple and he uttered with a smile, "I'm sure."

Lucianne studied Xandar's expression and scrutinized his emotions through their bond for a few seconds more just to be sure before she looked at Greg, and asked, "Would you like to hold her, Your Grace?"

Greg blinked in surprise, and he glanced at his cousin before asking, "Are you sure, My Queen?"

Lucianne offered a small smile. "Only if you want to, Your Grace."

Hailey walked over to the duke's side, and it was like Reida knew she was going to be handed to the next nearest creature, so her arms spread open, ready to cling onto the next adult. With Hailey's guidance, Greg held Reida properly in his arms and was too afraid to move a single inch for fear of making Reida uncomfortable.

Since Greg's hair wasn't long enough for Reida to play with, her small hands reached for his chin, lips, nose, and Greg didn't realize he was actually moving his face downwards so that Reida could reach whatever she wanted to touch, and that was his mistake. Before he knew it, Reida's fingers gently poked at his right eye, and Greg mouthed 'ow' before turning his head to the side to blink away the sensation.

Lucianne dashed to his side and uttered in guilt, "I'm so sorry, Your Grace." She looked at her daughter and held her tiny hand as she said, "Reida, no poking your uncle." She wanted to take Reida back but the baby was so scared of her increasingly furious mother that she leaned into Greg, refusing to let go.

Xandar came over when Greg was still blinking and took his daughter's hand from his wife before pecking a light kiss on it, and whispered with a proud smile, "That's my girl."

"Xandar!" Lucianne protested.

Christian suddenly joined the conversation, "I think this might just be my favorite niece."

With narrowed eyes, Lucianne said, "She's your ONLY niece, Christian."

When Greg was alright again, he looked at Reida and muttered, "You're really not as harmless as you look, are you, princess?"

Reida chuckled and yelled 'F\*ck!'.

Lucianne sighed in defeat. There was no way to unteach that now.

Greg scoffed lightly as he smiled and said, "F\*ck indeed, princess."

"Your Grace!"

A loud rumble came from a distance and closed in fast. Everyone in the hangar witnessed Tate's private jet landing. When it came to a stop, the door opened, and each rogue onboard alighted the airstair with at least one lycan escort.