

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 51 - Tips

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When Lucianne saw Tate and Margaret holding hands, she instinctively touched her husband's arm as her eyes sparkled when they met his smiling ones. After pecking a light kiss on her forehead, Xandar muttered, "Looks like it went well."

Margaret's surprised eyes shot to her daughter, and Lucianne motioned Stella to go to her. Although hesitant, Stella obeyed and took careful steps towards them. Margaret let go of Tate's hand when she pulled Stella into a relieved hug, and Tate came over to embrace Lucianne and greet the king and the duke.

When Tate saw Greg holding Reida a small distance away, he stared for another three seconds before he asked, "That's the other duke?"

"Yeah, why?" Lucianne answered simply.

"And that's Reida?"

"Yeah."

"The other duke is holding Reida."

"Yes."

"Reida, as in your daughter, Reida?"

Lucianne's eyes narrowed. "Congratulations, Tate. You have eyes, and your mind is working just fine."

Tate chuckled and confessed, "I just never pictured that duke to have it in him to be anywhere near a child."

"Well, none of us did," Xandar admitted as they glanced at Greg.

The duke was now being more careful with Reida's prying fingers as he mumbled under his breath, "You're not as boring as the Blackfurs, are you, princess? On the outside, you have a dull, Blackfur-resembling face. On the inside, you're just like your mother, seemingly harmless but dangerous. And it's a good thing. You know why? Because we don't want you ending up dim

and slow now, do we?" And Greg went on talking to Reida despite knowing that she couldn't understand a single word he was saying.

After Tate managed to tear his eyes away from that weird sight, Lucianne asked with a cheeky smile, "So, how was your first date?"

That wasn't an official first date with Margaret but it sure felt like a good-enough private moment with her. Tate couldn't hide his widening smile, and he glanced behind him, at his mate, before he whispered, "It went better than I expected. She's really opening up to me."

"Aww...that's great!" Lucianne offered him a congratulatory hug as Xandar patted his shoulder with a radiant smile.

Christian teased, "So, when's the wedding, Alpha?"

Tate started blushing as he chuckled briefly and said, "That might not happen so soon, Your Grace. I don't want to rush her."

Christian threw his cousin and cousin-in-law a cheeky smirk and said, "Welllllll, that sounds VERY familiar, cuz. Remind me, where have I heard it before?"

Lucianne started blushing, too. Xandar held her closer and planted a kiss on her hair. Margaret came forward with the rest of her pack members. She glanced over Christian and Xandar before her eyes remained fixed on Lucianne. Anyone could see the guilt swimming in her rosewood orbs. She offered a quick curtsy and uttered, "My Queen."

Her people behind her followed suit, addressing Lucianne in a non-synchronized way. Margaret and her people then greeted Xandar and the duke. The three royals bowed back in return, shocking all the rogues present.

Lucianne detached herself from her mate's hold and approached Margaret with a welcoming smile, wrapped her in a hug as she said, "It's good that everyone got here safely, Margaret. Thank you."

Margaret was so stunned by the hospitality despite her crudity with Lucianne on the first day that her mouth opened but she didn't know what to say. She thought of apologizing for her earlier behavior, or was thanking Lucianne for

taking care of Stella a better way forward first, or maybe she should convey her gratitude for giving her and her people a chance?

“YOU?!” Greg’s exclamation drew everyone’s attention to him as his look of disbelief fixed on Margaret. Even Reida was looking at Margaret with large, clueless orbs.

Margaret went from being vulnerably speechless to frustratingly shocked. Her eyes turned wide and fierce when she spoke to Tate, “You said we were working with rogues!”

Tate glanced at Greg before assuring Margaret, “Those are rogues, Mar.”

The affectionate way he called her had some effect on calming Margaret down but she still whisper-yelled, “No, that’s a royal! His followers are royal rogues. It’s different!”

Lucianne nodded once in comprehension before throwing Greg a teasing smirk and noted aloud, “Royal rogues, I see.”

Desmond declared with a wide grin, “Best of the best, queen.”

Margaret scoffed darkly and exclaimed, “More like pushiest of the pushiest!”

Alissa argued, “We asked one damn question, Maggot. If you just gave us the answer, we would have moved on without a fuss.”

Lucianne’s humor from the ‘royal rogues’ revelation died down, and she was too afraid to ask, but had to, “What fuss?”

Alissa’s defensiveness diminished when she cleared her throat and explained, “Well, My Queen, we crossed paths with this pack a few years back when we were tracking down a mole that infiltrated and escaped our circle. We asked around, and this pack was particularly...reluctant to offer direct answers, so—”

Azalea yelled, “You surrounded us at 3:42 in the morning! Did you expect us to be anything less than defensive?! And you set our supplies on fire!”

Desmond yelled back, “After ya’ll refuse to give answers! If ya’ll knew nothin’ ‘bout what we asked, then say it! Why were ya’ll tryin’ to delay us like ya’ll hidin’ somethin’?!”

“WAHHHHHH” Reida’s sudden cry stopped every adult’s bickering.

Greg's eyes widened in shock and his heart cracked. He held the little girl closer to his chest as he threw Desmond a glare so sharp that Desmond covered his mouth immediately.

Lucianne sprinted over, and took a red-faced Reida from the duke. "There there, Reida. Shh...shh...It's okay. It's okay. Mama's here. Everything's okay. Shh..."

Xandar came over with worried eyes, stroking his daughter's arm as Lucianne cooed and planted soft kisses on Reida's forehead. Reida's cries gradually subsided with her mother's assuring voice and scent, and her father's comforting touch. The cries eventually turned into softer sobs and sniffles before her tiny hands reached for her father's thumb, holding it close to her chest just to feel safe.

The royal couple sighed in relief when that was over, and so did everyone around them, especially those who shouted. Since Reida didn't want to let go of her father's thumb, Xandar took her from Lucianne and cuddled her. The indecisive baby then let go of her father's thumb as she took her mother's fingers and glued them to her chest before leaning into her father for his scent.

With a soft smile, Xandar muttered, "Looks like we're both stuck with her again." He then pecked a kiss on Lucianne's temple.

Suddenly, they heard certain motions around them. As they tore their eyes from Reida, Xandar's protectiveness made him pull Lucianne closer to his body without a second thought. The royal couple's eyes turned defensive by instinct.

Greg and every rogue got down on one knee as they started conveying their apologies at the same time. Xandar and Lucianne's sharp hearing caught most of them.

Greg started, "I'm deeply sorry for the distress my followers and I have caused the princess and you, My Queen."

Desmond followed, "Really sorry 'bout that, queen. Ain't gonna happen again."

Margaret was saying, "I should've controlled my temper. I'm sorry, Your Highnesses."

Azalea spoke very fast, “I didn’t mean to shout. I just got mad and—”

Reida started getting restless again, and Xandar covered her exposed ear as his animal made him emit a low, warning growl to silence everyone present. Lucianne stroked his biceps to calm his beast as she spoke to everyone in a clear voice, “Everyone simply acted on instinct. I’m partly at fault for choosing to ask about the time your groups crossed paths. Please, stand. All of you. Let’s just head for the meeting room at the station now.”

“As you wish, My Queen,” they uttered in unison, and the synchronicity surprised Xandar, Christian and Lucianne herself.

When they were walking to the ready cars, Margaret felt a sharp pain that surged from her nape to the top of her head. She gr0aned and fell to her knees as Tate asked her what was wrong. Her eyes were shut tight, her body was fidgeting, and cold sweat started appearing on her forehead as Tate guided her to sit on the floor.

Tate asked Azalea in dismay, “What’s happening to her? Is this normal?”

Azalea looked worried, too. “It’s not. I’ve never seen her like this.”

“Mom!” Stella screamed, hoping her mother could hear her.

Lucianne carefully detached herself from Reida’s grip and rushed over. When Margaret’s eyes forced themselves open, they weren’t their normal rosewood color. They were bright red, and Margaret muttered, “Blood. There’s a lot of bl00d.”

“Blood?” Tate repeated as his worried eyes locked with Lucianne.

Suddenly, Lucianne’s own eyes glazed over.

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‘Aunt Lucy?’ It was Lucianne’s favorite nephew.

‘Liam, sweetheart. You can mind-link!’

Liam had just turned four. Wolves could only mind-link when they were six or seven, with a few exceptions like Liam. His voice shook a little when he said, 'I t-tried so many times. Um...Aunt Lucy, a-are you coming home soon?'

That was a very unusual question. The fact that Liam forced himself to mind-link her was another thing to be worried about. She tried to mask her anxiety when she continued speaking to him in a soft, assuring voice, 'Well, I'll have to ask Uncle Xandar. We'll discuss it and make the trip there with little Reida soon, okay?'

'NO! AUNT LUCY, DON'T BRING REIDA!'

'What? Why not?'

Liam sounded devastated and afraid when he linked like he was close to tears, 'Aunt Lucy, daddy s-said there was a f-fight at the border. Big Guy Albus and Big Sis K-Kiera are in the p-pack clinic.'

Lucianne felt her heart sink. Kiera was the newly-appointed Gamma. Her skills were second only to Lucianne in Blue Crescent. Albus was normally very swift, too. What happened?

Liam's scared voice continued to ring through the link, 'Daddy and mommy asked us to stay in our rooms. I snuck out. Daddy's office door was open. I heard him tell mommy that someone wants to hurt you, Aunt Lucy...and—and they might come after daddy, and then mommy.' Liam was sobbing now as he pleaded, 'Aunt Lucy, please come home and fight for us. Please.'

Lucianne's protective instinct over her birth pack took over, and any fear and anxiety she felt was suppressed when she linked in assurance, 'I'll be home soon, Liam. Stay in your room until I get there, okay?'

'Okay. Thank you, Aunt Lucy. I love you.'

'I love you too, Liam.'

When the link ended, Lucianne found herself in Xandar's arms. Christian was holding Reida, looking at his queen in concern. It was when Xandar cupped her cheeks and started gently wiping away her tears did Lucianne realize she was tearing during the link. After Xandar planted a deep kiss on her forehead, she uttered, "We have to get to Blue Crescent. Now."

“What happened?” Tate asked, equally worried since White Blood and Blue Crescent had long been allies.

After wiping away her tears, she met Tate’s brown orbs as she announced, “There was an attack at the border. Kiera and Albus are in the clinic, injured. Juan suspects that whoever ordered the attack is after me. I have to get there before any of my friends lose their lives.”

Xandar started muttering, “It’s a little strange for Juan to tell you this, actually.” Xandar knew his brother-in-law well enough to know that Juan wouldn’t ask his own sister to come home when there was a threat against her.

Lucianne’s eyes turned fierce when she said, “It wasn’t Juan. LIAM told me. When we get to Blue Crescent, I’m going to k!ll my brother for not telling me this.”

Christian muttered, “Now, that sounds more like Alpha Juan. You two go ahead first. I’ll put Reida at my place with Mrs Clifford and Annie, and round up more lycan warriors. We should be able to catch up with you guys within an hour.”

“Thank you, Christian,” Lucianne uttered gratefully, and k!ssed her daughter on her forehead before whispering, “Be safe, Reida.”

Xandar did the same and murmured, “We’ll be home soon, cupcake.”

Margaret asked Stella to stay behind, too, much to the teenager’s dismay. Margaret had a vision when she felt that sharp pain from earlier. In it, as she told Tate, Azalea and anyone else who was listening, she saw wolves, lycans and vampires fighting each other. Bodies were thrown and bl00d was splattered everywhere as the howls of anguish filled the air.

With Xandar and Lucianne’s permission, Margaret got half of her followers to stay behind because they weren’t trained enough to fight yet, while the trained ones stuck to their leader were following her to Blue Crescent without question.

Greg linked thirty more creatures from the Cave, asking them to meet him at Blue Crescent.

They boarded Tate's jet, and Lucianne stared out of the window, her thoughts far away as she sat on her mate's lap. Xandar rubbed her shoulders, her forearms, pecked kisses in her hair, but nothing was working. Her worry was still strong.

Tate came over with Margaret all of a sudden, and the Alpha cleared his throat to get Xandar and Lucianne's attention. Lucianne blinked herself out of her daze, smiled and asked, "Yeah, what is it?"

The two sat facing the king and queen before Tate casually began, "So...I linked Zeke and Zelena about this, and then Lovelace, too."

"Okay," Lucianne noted and waited for him to continue. Those were their strongest allies. There was no issue in telling them about the threat. Everyone had to be alert.

"As it turns out, they already knew and were on their way there," Tate uttered. Lucianne's eyebrows furrowed as Tate concluded, "Meaning to say only White Blood and you weren't invited to Blue Crescent's pack-defense party this evening."

The lilac part of Lucianne's orbs turned onyx as she muttered simply, "I see."

"Juan probably just wanted you safe, Lucy," Tate suggested meekly.

Lucianne chose her next words carefully before speaking in a deathly, hushed tone, "Keeping something like this from me...while putting my friends' lives and his own at risk...does NOT keep me safe. Whoever it is will get to me eventually. I doubt they care how many creatures they'd have to kill to get my attention."

A moment of silence passed before Lucianne asked, "You told Toby, too, right?"

"Yeah, he was pissed until he heard you didn't know either. Now, he's just waiting for a show when we reach Blue Crescent."

"He'll definitely be getting a show." Lucianne muttered.

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In the early evening at Blue Crescent, Alpha Juan got Luna Hale to promise that she would stay in the pack house with their pups while he came out to greet Alpha Zeke, Luna Zelena and Gamma Raden from Blood Eclipse, Gamma Sylvia from Crimson, and also Luna Lovelace from Midnight, along with the pack warriors they brought with them. Juan stationed six of his own warriors around the pack house just to keep his family safe.

When Juan reached his allies, he hugged each of them and uttered gratefully, "Thank you for coming on such short notice."

Zeke swallowed a lump in his throat and exchanged an uneasy glance with Zelena before he addressed the Alpha, "There's something you should know, Juan. See, when we were on the road, Ta—"

"AHEM!" A familiar voice pulled the pack leaders' attention away from each other, and they witnessed Toby approaching them in large strides, his car parked next to Zeke's.

Juan blinked in surprise, but when he saw that his allies didn't share his surprise, he knew he was alone in this. Toby patted Juan on the back and spoke without a smile, "Hope you don't mind, Juan. I invited myself."

The gears in Juan's head turned as he muttered, "If you're here, that means..."

Suddenly, Juan heard his youngest son scream in excitement, "AUNT LUCY!" And everyone saw the little boy dashing out of the pack house, his mother followed closely behind as six cars entered the compound. As soon as the first one pulled to a stop, Lucianne alighted from the passenger's seat before Liam jumped into her open arms.

Juan then complained to Zeke and the others, "You know, the whole point of not telling her was so that she WON'T be here if and when they attacked again."

Zeke argued in defense, "None of us told her!"

"Then how did she find out?! How did HE find out?!" Juan gestured at Toby like he wasn't right next to him.

Toby started being dramatic, "Ooooo....looks like someone snitched, Juan. Who could it be?"

Juan narrowed his eyes. “It really does kll to get White Blood to side with me instead of my sister, doesn’t it, Toby?”

“Considering that White Blood didn’t receive an invitation when the rest of the alliance members did? Yes.”

“It’s my pack. I make the decisions here. I send the invitations. And the only reason White Blood wasn’t on my list was because Tate was where Lucy was. Lucy would’ve suspected something was up. If she didn’t, Xandar would. Tate is not hard to read.” Juan noted the obvious as he prayed that Lucianne would speak to Liam and Hale a little longer so that he could come up with a good excuse.

The truth was, if their positions were reversed, Juan would have wanted Lucy to tell him about this threat, too. He would have wanted to know. And he would be enraged if Lucy kept this from him. His eyes would be on fire, much like how Lucianne’s orbs were at that moment she began barging towards him.

Juan started wondering why his brother-in-law still had almost no control over Lucianne. He was the king, Goddess damn it! Then again, it wasn’t as if Juan himself could control Hale either.

“Any advice?” Juan muttered ominously as he watched Hale and Liam disappear into the pack house. His sister’s hair was up in a tight bun like she was ready for a fight. This was not good.

Zeke bit his upper lip for a moment before he suggested, “Ask about Reida, maybe? It might cool Lucy off a little. Good luck.” After a ‘good luck’ pat on Juan’s back, every ally took three steps back as Lucianne entered their circle with Xandar, Tate and Margaret.

Lucianne looked up at her brother with a sinister smile and said, “Hey, Juan. I had the sudden urge to visit. Looks like I picked the right time. All our closest allies seem to be here as well.”

Juan took Zeke’s advice when he cleared his throat and asked, “So, how’s Reida?”

“She’s alright, now in Christian and Annie’s place. We didn’t bring her along. You know why?” She took one step closer towards her brother and growled under her breath, “Because I heard there was a threat that put two of my friends in the clinic this morning.”

Juan shot Zeke a glare, “Ask about Reida to cool her down? Does she seem cooled down to you?”

Zeke shrugged and said, “I tried.”

Lovelace unhelpfully added, “Juan, honestly. She’s your sister. Shouldn’t you know best?”

Lucianne’s fist was about to land on Juan’s jaw before Xandar restrained her arms and held her back by her abdomen, creating a safe distance between the siblings.

“Baby, breathe,” he cooed into her ear that was also heated with fury.

Juan decided to use this little time to explain to the struggling, onyx-eyed former Gamma of Blue Crescent, “Lucy, I was going to tell you.”

Toby interrupted in disbelief, “Were you?” Tate nudged Toby, prompting him to be quiet.

As Lucianne continued struggling to break away, Juan continued racking his brain for a plausible explanation, “We just wanted to be sure about our suspicions before we told you.”

Xandar was now familiar with Lucianne’s forms of attack, so he knew that he had to restrain her by her arms and one leg to hold her in place. But he threw Juan a worried look, his way of saying, “I don’t know how much longer I can hold her.”

“Baby, please. Just breathe. Save your strength for battle. How about that? If you fight Juan now, you’d have less strength to fight later if we have to fight.”

Lucianne took a few heavy breaths and stopped trying to escape. Xandar started loosening his grip before he realized that Lucianne was misleading him to do just that to ease her escape. He pulled her back immediately and she was growling aloud now. Some of the Blue Crescent folks who were

minding their own business even flinched at the sound. One of the warriors on his way to border duty almost tripped.

“Aunt Lucy?” Liam’s sudden voice put Lucianne’s struggling and murderous thoughts to a halt. Every adult’s eyes zoned in on the little boy who dared approach the monstrous queen when everyone else was kept at a safe distance from her.

Xandar let his wife go when he felt her mood go soft, and his human part knew that Lucianne wouldn’t be violent around children. Lucianne went from a ready-to-kill lycan to the sweet-and-attentive aunt when she smiled brightly and squatted to give her nephew her full attention, “Yes, Liam?”

“I made this for Reida. Can you give it to her?” Lucianne looked at the rocket ship Liam drew and colored, with two kids inside. One with the label ‘Liam’, the other was labelled ‘Reida’. Her animal cooed as her heart melted. She noticed that Liam even glued a small piece of folded cardboard on the back so that the drawing would stand.

Her eyes glistened as she wrapped the little boy in a hug and whispered, “Thank you, Liam. Reida would love it.”

When she parted their bodies and pecked a kiss on his forehead, Liam asked with guilty eyes, “Aunt Lucy, are you angry at me for asking you to come back?”

“YOU ASKED HER TO COME BACK?!” Juan exclaimed in shock. Of all the snitchers! Juan thought he made his pups stay in their rooms before he spoke to Hale. How did Liam even tell his aunt?! He had no phone!

Liam was visibly frightened by his father’s outburst, and instinctively took a step closer to his favorite person. Lucianne cupped one of his cheeks and gently made him look at her as she said, “No, Liam. Aunt Lucy isn’t angry. I’m proud of you. Thank you for telling me.”

Liam gave Lucianne another hug before Lucianne made him promise that he was going to stay with his mother and siblings in the pack house while the adults dealt with things. At the pack house entrance, Liam gave Lucianne a little wave before disappearing behind the door. Juan signaled the warriors he stationed there to lock it.

Lucianne's sights returned to Juan when she showed him the drawing that Liam gave her and declared, "If secrets like this are kept from me again, it'll be you alone on this rocket ship on a one-way trip to space."

Toby scoffed. Greg and the others pressed back smiles.

Juan rolled his eyes and then suggested, "Let's just talk about this at the crime scene."

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After Lucianne kept Liam's rocket ship in the glove compartment of the car, Juan led the entire party to the far side of the pack, near their river. This was where Lucianne would come to on her 4 a.m. runs when she still lived in Blue Crescent. She'd sit right next to that boulder that had some blood stains now. Lucianne's predatory eyes started looking for a trail, and found a few more drops here and there on the ground and dried leaves.

Lucianne had the sudden urge to ask, "Seriously, Juan, why didn't you tell me?"

Juan persisted arguing, "Lucy, this is my pack. You're my sister. What did you expect me to do? This could have been you! The vampire scent is lingering over there, across the river, meaning Kiera and Albus were attacked there and thrown over here. And do you know what the doctors found in their blood? Vampire venom. And the biggest joke?" He let out a short, depressing chuckle, "No one who saw Kiera and Albus being tossed here saw a single vampire during the attack!"

Fear entered Lucianne's eyes. Still, she put on a brave front. But everyone noticed her weakened voice when she asked rhetorically, "See, was that so hard to say?"

From the side, Toby muttered, "Well, I don't know if it was hard to say but it was definitely hard to hear." His hand subconsciously moved to his neck, because wolves learned in school that during the war, vampires went for their enemies' necks when it came to injecting venom with their fangs. It was the fastest way to kill them.

Lucianne narrowed her eyes at her best friend, "Toby, you're supposed to be on my side."

“I am. But still, no one saw any vampires, which is kinda creepy. You haven’t happened to develop some sort of super vision to see what the rest of us can’t see, have you, Lucy?”

Lucianne ignored the question and asked Juan, “Is the scent over there a mix of chrysanthemum and pine leaves?”

Juan nodded, “Yes.”

Greg noted aloud, “That definitely confirms that it was a vampire.”

Juan’s eyebrows furrowed when he addressed Greg, “I’m still shocked that you’re here instead of the other duke, Your Grace, but yes, this concludes that those were vampires.”

“Those?” Greg questioned.

“My warriors smelled two individual scents on top of the vampire’s general scent.”

“I see,” Greg muttered, exchanging a hard look with his cousin and Lucianne.

Juan continued, “And, Lucy, before you kill me or send me to space, I’d better show you what one of them left in Kiera’s hand after she collapsed.”

He rummaged through his left pocket and took out a crumpled sheet of paper and handed it to his sister. Lucianne unfolded it, and read the note aloud, ‘You know who we’re after. We’re waiting for HER.’

Xandar’s hold on her shoulders tightened. Greg’s forehead creased, so did Lovelace’s. Toby shuddered. Tate held Margaret closer. Zeke started rubbing Zelena’s right shoulder to reduce her anxiety.

Christian and the warriors arrived and entered the discussion circle. Greg’s followers reached at about the same time as well. As soon as Christian joined the circle and registered everyone’s ominous faces, he asked frankly, “Okay, how f*cked up is it this time?”

Lucianne muttered, “I’m hoping less f*cked up than it was 204 years ago. We don’t need another war.”

Christian blinked repeatedly, not believing what he was hearing before Xandar started filling him in. The lycan warriors behind the duke matched everyone's ominous expressions. At the end of the tale, Christian heaved a heavy sigh and shook his head before he spoke in a low voice, "So, long story short, it's super f*cked up."

Lucianne then asked Juan as she continued staring at the blood on the boulder, "Has anyone smelled any vampires since the attack, apart from those across the river?"

"No. I've put every warrior to work. Literally everyone is sniffing around the entire pack right now. I sniffed my own house ten times and I'm still worried."

Christian asked in dismay, "Alpha Juan, if your warriors are sniffing around...are you saying that the vampires could still be IN the pack?"

After exchanging a gloomy look with Lucianne, Juan muttered, "It's possible."

Greg questioned, "For clarification's sake, you have warriors everywhere, correct? Streets, trees, homes, borders, trails?"

"Yes, everywhere," Juan confirmed.

Greg then spoke with certainty, "Then I doubt they're in the pack. Their scent wouldn't vanish that quickly. If no one has found anything yet, there's probably nothing...that, or they're hiding in the sewer."

An awkward silence followed before Lucianne asked the question going through everyone's minds, "Your Grace, is that a joke or—"

"Oh, it is a joke, My Queen. I saw a few sewer openings on the way here. No adult vampire could fit through them. And I doubt a child did this." He gestured at the blood stains and trail in front of them.

Xandar then said, "A discretus can see other discretus. We should contact the empress for help. Maybe she could send a few of her people to guard Blue Crescent in case the intruders return."

Juan's sights went from his brother-in-law to his sister, whose black-and-lilac orbs were begging him to agree to let them help. So, he sighed and nodded as he said, "That would be great, Xandar. Thank you."

As soon as the green light was given, Lucianne got out her phone from her back pocket and began looking for Pellethia's number when a sudden gust of wind came from her side and snatched her device right out of her hand. Everyone watched her phone flying across the space like it was thrown before it stopped mid-air. The phone was held facing them, and something in the air threw it up and caught it twice before crushing Lucianne's device against a tree trunk.

Greg cursed, "Damn it."

Everyone heard a stream of cackling laughter from across the river. The warriors and rogues took their positions as a man leaped from one of the trees across the river and onto Blue Crescent's land.

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The moment this person came into view, Lucianne sighed in frustration and spoke exasperatingly, "Seriously, why can't you rogue Alphas just die?"

Xandar stood in front of Lucianne, blocking her as much as she allowed him to. He didn't know who the h*ll the bare-c.hest six-footer was, but this one had definitely pissed off his wife before.

Former-Alpha of Fleet Wood, Draxon, declared, "That's not very nice, Lucy. And, for the record, Jake really did like you. Idio—"

Xandar growled at the mention of Jake, and pounced on Draxon. Draxon didn't avoid the king's attack fast enough, so Xandar caught his leg, broke his limbs and was cracking his neck slowly. Draxon howled in pain before he whimpered and scratched Xandar's hands to loosen his tightening grip, but to no avail. Then, a gust of the wind from behind Xandar nicked the left side of his arm. Another gust came from the front and nicked the right side of the same arm.

Before he knew it, his arm lost strength, and Draxon was dropped before something invisible threw him across the river. Lucianne dashed to her husband's side and examined his arm. Grey lines started appearing, and she felt his arm weakening. It was getting numb, and Lucianne was about to rush him to the pack clinic before she felt him healing through their bond. The numbness diminished, and the grey lines disappeared even before reaching his elbow.

Lucianne didn't trust her eyes despite no longer feeling the sting and numbness through the mate-bond. With furrowed brows, she traced his forearm before stepping back to see if any other part of his body was affected. Before her eyes were done scanning every inch of Xandar's exposed skin, Xandar pulled her into a hug and pecked a kiss on her hair as he said, "I'm fine, baby. You healed me. Our bond healed me. I'm okay now. Thank you."

She sighed in relief, thanking Goddess that her ability to heal from poisonous substances was now shared with Xandar after they mated and marked each other. It was fortunate that the vampire venom was so little that his immune system fought it and won within seconds, like how Lucianne's own blood neutralized minute amounts of silver when she first ingested drops of it as a child.

"YOU IDIOTS COULDN'T STOP HIM SOONER?! I COULD HAVE DIED!"

Draxon's voice grabbed everyone's attention once more. Lucianne's angered eyes turned sapphire blue, but before she could do anything, Draxon warned in a taunting tone, "Ah ah ah. Don't even think about it, Lucy. You have no idea how many amigos I brought with me. You wouldn't want everyone here to get vampire venom by accident now, do you?"

Lucianne registered the strong scents of chrysanthemum and pine leaves, as did everyone else. As if through silent agreement, everyone started subtly sniffing out the individual scents on top of the general vampire odor, in order to count how many were surrounding them, and where their exact positions were.

Lucianne, Xandar, Christian and Greg smelled six in front; Toby, Tate and Margaret could detect another six on the right; the warriors counted only five on their left; and everyone else behind knew that there were about twenty behind them. The vampires were outnumbered. If the wolves and lycans acted fast, they could kill every single one in no time. But their aim had to be very, very precise. They only had one shot.

"Get on with it, Draxon. What do you want?" Lucianne decided to engage in nonsensical chit chat with Draxon to buy her friends and family time to pinpoint the exact spot that each discretus was standing at.

"It's really simple. Just stand where you are while we do a test run."

“Of what?” She continued as her allies took small steps towards their targeted opponents.

Draxon pushed his shoulder-long blonde hair behind his ear as he stated matter-of-factly, “Controlling you, or klling you, depending on what works.”

A rumble of ferocious growls were thrown at him, and the ones who stood closest to Lucianne were about to cross the river before Lucianne’s outstretched arms stopped them. Thankfully, too.

Those in front smelled vampires creating a barricade between them and the river. One more step forward and one of the lycans Lucianne stopped might have been attacked or nicked, maybe even both. Lucianne felt a presence directly in front of her. In fact, she felt the creature glowering down at her. She threw a sharp glare and emitted a low growl into the air, and felt the creature take a step back.

Lucianne’s sights shifted to Draxon again when she said, “You know, Draxon, if you still can’t make up your mind on whether to control or klll me when you’re just across a river in a territory that I’m very familiar with, you’re even dumber than I remembered.”

Draxon was offended but he was controlled, and scoffed darkly to shake off the humiliation. “Keep talking, Lucy. That mouth of yours might have gotten a lot of creatures to kneel at your feet, but not me. Trust me, when the dust settles, ALL OF YOU will be at MY feet.”

It was Juan’s turn to scoff. “Us? At the feet of someone who doesn’t even have the balls to be on the field ready to fight his opponents? One who had to use another species just to get an upper-hand, and even then, still chooses to stay eight feet away because he’s too afraid to die?”

Those on Juan’s side were chuckling but then they heard hisses and growls before ten vampires appeared from behind Draxon. Juan linked every other warrior in Blue Crescent. Once his eyes cleared, Draxon noted with a sinister smirk, “Linking for help is a big mistake, Juan.”

Lucianne spoke in her brother’s defense, “How about you think about the way your Beta kicked your a.ss and claimed your t!tle and pack before you tell my brother what to do as an Alpha!”

“Lucy. Lucy. Lucy. Still so presumptuous. My former Beta was NOT better than me when he took my title. He couldn’t even keep his own mate and pups safe when my amigos stormed in. Weak, like I always said he was.”

The realization shook them. They knew Fleet Wood was decimated by rogues, but they didn’t know it was Draxon’s rogues. Margaret gasped a little too loudly, drawing attention that she didn’t want from her former mate.

Draxon threw Margaret a bored look when he said, “Yeah, I saw you back there. Still not worth my time. But your parents died a quick death, I can tell you that.”

“You killed them?!” Margaret hissed angrily as her eyes glistened as her animal howled in pain at their loss. It had been thirteen years, but she still missed her parents every single day. Tate held her by her shoulders when he growled at Draxon.

Draxon explained casually like he didn’t order a massacre of his own pack, “Well, no. The people I hired killed...everyone, really. Whoever said revenge wasn’t the answer should really get a reality check.” He chuckled darkly and declared, “It felt really good.”

Lucianne hissed, “Enough of this!” Her claws extended in an instant and plunged through the vampire in front of her. The discretus shrieked and came into view before he fell onto the ground and the rest got the cue to start attacking. One thing good about harming vampires – they won’t recover. They don’t have the quick healing abilities of wolves and lycans.

Lucianne’s eyes turned sapphire again and she was compelling Draxon to kneel and stop breathing as he choked out in a hoarse voice, “Do...it.”

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06 minutes read

Ten vampires appeared by Draxon’s side and immediately got to work. Their teal-green eyes turned pitch black, confirming that they were decipios, who channeled their manipulation powers on Lucianne.

Xandar was helping those at the back, and had just killed another discretus who almost got one of the Blue Crescent warriors when he felt his wife’s mind being compressed and her legs giving way. He started sprinting towards her before he was knocked down by two other invisible bloodsuckers.

The king pushed himself up immediately, and started blindly scratching the air in front of him with his claws as he sprinted towards Lucianne, whose heart rate was increasing as she continued the mental battle with ten manipulators.

Xandar yelled, "Get those motherf*ckers across the river away from my wife!"

Disregarding their own safety, every lycan and werewolf tried their best to charge forward, but many were blocked by the invisible freaks. Some lycans and werewolves even got nicked, and fell to the ground.

The discretus were working in pairs now. One to distract and one to bite. Draxon was smiling broadly at how things were playing out. He especially enjoyed seeing Lucianne on her knees, her hands on the ground pulling at the grass to cope with the mental torment, and her panting was as visible as the beads of sweat falling from her head to the ground below her.

But within a few moments that felt like an eternity, everyone heard Lucianne growling louder than anyone had ever heard before as she pushed herself up from the ground like she merely experienced a simple fall. The queen emitted her Authority, which pushed back the manipulators' compression just enough for her to get to Draxon.

The manipulators were visibly stunned, and exchanged glances before trying to manipulate her mind again, trying to confuse her into thinking that Draxon and them were actually her allies, and those on her side were enemies. Lucianne exerted her full strength and blocked it all out, wasting no time in compelling Draxon to raise his hands.

The former Alpha's eyes were filled with horror when his claws extended without his control, and he began attacking the manipulators around him. Lucianne managed to get him to kill two and injure one before one of them twisted his neck. Draxon's lifeless body fell to the ground with a thud, and Lucianne was the first to jump across the river with another ferocious growl and fiery eyes, shifting into her lycan form as she did so.

The manipulators panicked and turned to run away from the white-furred, striped-tailed beast. Lucianne easily caught up to the slowest one, and she killed her first decipio, then a few moments later, her second. Xandar, Greg, Christian and the alliance members were catching up as well.

The manipulators mind-linked one another, hastily trying to hatch a plan as they kept running. One tripped, and she met her end when Christian ripped

her head off. Juan crushed her detached skull when he leaped over her corpse.

Xandar closed in, and after a quick estimation, leaped from the ground and landed flat on one, ripping off his arms and hearing him scream before Xandar snapped his neck.

Six down. Four to go.

After the four remaining decipios decided on what they were going to do, they leaped on separate trees and climbed higher and higher. Lucianne and the others were not backing down. They started climbing, albeit slower since they don't practice climbing anything. The wolves had to shift back to do the same.

The vampires picked whatever they could find on the branches and threw it at them, mostly fruits and nests. Greg was still in his human form, and he got so frustrated at the mango-throwing that he started catching the fruits being thrown at him just to throw them back.

When the vampires were at the highest branches, they exchanged a firm nod and targeted Xandar's mind. Xandar instantly fell onto the ground with a loud thump, and Lucianne leaped off the tree she was on without hesitation. She didn't feel anything in Xandar's body was broken but the fact that his animal seemed to feel trapped was worrying her.

She tried mind-linking him, 'Xandar. Xandar, darling. Can you hear me?'

His animal pushed itself up as it wobbled around, shaking its head hard to get the caging sensation out. Lucianne's lycan steadied him by his arms as her animal whimpered, trying to get her mate to open his eyes. She felt his annoyance, struggle and frustration, and it was getting worse.

She cupped his face and her thumb stroked his cheek like how her human part often did to calm him down. His breathing hastened instead of steadied, and when his eyes opened, they weren't the lilac or onyx ones Lucianne fell for. They were dark green.

'Xandar, listen to me. You can fight this. Trust your animal. It knows AHFFF—' Lucianne's lycan howled in anguish when Xandar's claws plunged right through her abdomen before scratching her face and then tossing her at

a tree. The smell of her blood filled the air as those climbing the trees didn't think twice before aborting their plan to chase the remaining decipios.

Xandar felt her anguish through their bond, and he too held his abdomen as he steadied himself, anger and worry set in his eyes. Even so, he wasn't done with Lucianne, who was still trying to recover as she endured the pain.

He stood before her, shifted back and growled, "You WILL regret hurting MY MATE!"

As her lycan continued whimpering, an express plea for him to wake up, her human part tried to link him again, 'Xandar, snap out of it! I am your mate!'

His face started twitching, like he was fighting off something before the manipulation took full force and he was about to pounce on Lucianne before Greg knocked him out of the way. Almost immediately, the duke then lifted the king and threw him as far away as he could from the queen.

With agonizing eyes, Greg tried to help Lucianne sit up as gently as possible, and when he heard a disgruntled growl and saw Xandar getting back up again, shifting as he did so, the duke barked out his order to his followers, "WE SWORE ALLEGIANCE TO THE QUEEN, NOT THE KING! PROTECT HER AT ALL COST!"

Christian came over, and Greg pushed aside his reluctance to speak to a Blackfur and told him, "Stay with her." He then joined his people and shifted to stop his idiotic cousin.

The sight of Xandar fighting against their friends and allies was so painful to watch that Lucianne's eyes pooled with tears. Christian blocked her view and linked her gently, 'Focus on your recovery, My Queen. They can slow him down, but you might be the only one who'll be able to stop him.'

She took his advice and started trying to heal faster. That was when she witnessed a sight that would forever be etched in her memory, that would now invade her dreams and wake her up as nightmares – her closest friends attacking one another.

Blood was already oozing out of the wound on the left side of Zeke's torso, and he was still dodging blows from his dark green-eyed mate when he yelled, "Zel! Snap out of it! It's me!"

Toby was fighting off a manipulated Juan, “Juan! C’mon! I didn’t invite myself for this! It’s just bl00ds.uickers’ magic! Fight it, Goddess damn it!”

Margaret was facing the same dilemma with Azalea. “Az! Quit it! The real crooks are getting away!”

And that was how it was everywhere Lucianne looked. Tate was trying to land blows on a dead-faced Lovelace without hurting her too much; Phelton was struggling to find his best forms of attack without over-hurting Raden; and even Laurent was blindly attacking her colleagues.

With the little strength she had, Lucianne linked them, ‘Knock them out cold!’

They threw her an ‘are you sure’ look before dodging another attack from their respective opponents, and concluded that blacking them out was the only safe way for now.

Toby aimed at the back of Juan’s head and the Alpha fell flat on the ground. “Sorry about this, brother. You can punch me in the gut later.” He went on to help the next one.

Margaret saw what the others were doing, and got the idea, so she knocked Azalea out with little difficulty but a lot of guilt.

Zeke dodged a few more attacks from his mate before he said, “Babe, I’m really sorry about this. I love you.” Zelena growled before Zeke knocked her out, then sat on the ground and held her in his arms, burying his face in her hair as he whispered an endless stream of ‘I’m sorry’.

The sound of bone-cracking brought Lucianne’s attention back to Xandar. He was snapping limbs and throwing wolves and lycans. Their anguished howls and bl00d wasn’t making him any more merciful. Greg began wrestling with him but it was clear that the duke wasn’t going to win. The mate-bond made the Lycan King almost invincible.

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0 5 minutes read

Lucianne linked Christian, ‘Help Greg!’

Christian seemed hesitant before his queen’s order came out fiercer in her weakened voice, ‘Help Greg Claw, Your Grace. That’s an order.’

He nodded in compliance and left to join the effort to stop Xandar, shifting on the way. Xandar punched Greg to the ground before landing two merciless blows on his face and abdomen. He then held Greg by his neck with one hand and lifted him off the ground. His fingers were slowly tightening, and Greg's dazed animal began losing air.

Christian thought to himself, 'I'm so sorry for this, cuz.' He then plunged his claws right through Xandar's arm, earning an angry growl and forcing him to drop the other duke.

Greg was visibly surprised, but not for long. After exchanging a knowing glance with his distant cousin, both dukes pinned the king to the ground on either side. Their combined forces seemed to hold him. Just when Greg was about to ask Ivory to knock Xandar out, the king growled again and flicked the dukes away like they were mere insects.

Both their bodies flew and knocked against trees at a significant distance away. The impact hurt their spines and head, and they were trying their best to heal as quickly as they could.

In that time, Xandar sped for Lucianne in strides so large with a force so strong that it knocked away anyone standing in its way. When he reached Lucianne, he pinned her neck to the tree. She knew mind-linking him wouldn't work, so she resorted to using her Authority.

She directed the power to his mind, focusing on connecting with his animal. Right there, in the centre of his animal's control room, she helped him push away the manipulation effects just like how she pushed her own earlier. It was a little easier with him because the manipulators had already left. There was no one pushing back her efforts. It was just her broadening his view again.

Xandar was shaking his head, trying to fight it off with her, and eventually, he did. His grip around her neck loosened, and Lucianne gently removed his hand off that area. The lilac shades returned to his eyes, and the sight of his injured mate petrified him. 'BABY! WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?! WHO DID THIS?!'

Lucianne sighed in relief and her animal cooed as it pressed its forehead against his. When she still heard the snarls, howls and shouting, realization dawned on her that the battle was still ongoing. She detached herself from Xandar and emitted her Authority on the rest of them, removing the effects of the manipulation, and the manipulated ones came to an abrupt halt in their

attack as they looked at their ally, colleague or friend in utter confusion. Some weren't even embarrassed to ask, "Uh...what am I doing?"

'BABY! TALK TO ME!' Xandar urged, and his animal whimpered as it gently shook her by her forearms.

'Get me to the river, please. I need to wash this off,' she motioned to the blood stains on her face. It was just so much more visible with her white fur.

Xandar's black-furred animal carried her ever so gently and dashed to the riverbank, nuzzling her face in sadness along the way. Her lycan was drained from the physical and mental battle, and retreated from exhaustion. By the time Xandar reached the river, Lucianne was in her human form, naked.

It was the first time Xandar and his animal were not aroused by her fully-exposed body. Their worry and anger at Lucianne's injuries took precedence. After sitting by the riverbank, he shifted back as well just to be able to talk to her easier. When Lucianne was done cleaning her face and abdomen with the river water, she covered her breasts with her arms and Xandar's broad arm covered her lower area.

He sat butt-naked on the ground when his onyx eyes pierced into hers and asked, "Who did this to you, Lucy? Tell me." He felt her animal's exhaustion and the insides of her abdomen were still healing as well.

One of her hands reached for his face as she said, "It was the vampires, Xandar. Really."

"No," Xandar knew she was lying. "You wouldn't be this injured if it were a vampire. Their claws wouldn't have made a wound this deep. Tell me who did this, Lucy." His best guess was another wolf or lycan. Maybe Draxon brought friends that none of them saw at first?

"Darling, it really was the rogue vampires, the proditors. The decip—"

Xandar looked her dead in the eye and asked again in a low snarl, "That's enough, Lucy. No more trying to protect someone else over yourself. Who. Did. This?"

Greg's cold voice came from behind, "If you let the queen finish, cousin, you'd know that the one who injured her was you."

Xandar turned and growled at his cousin who didn't even flinch like many others did before the king declared in a low, firm voice which held nothing but ferocious certainty and devotion, "I would NEVER hurt MY WIFE!"

"Cuz..." Christian's ominous look and careful interruption made Xandar second-think what he just said.

Then, everything started to come back. How he felt his mind being invaded when he was climbing the tree where a female vampire was climbing; him falling to the ground; his mate's white lycan coming to him; him...plunging his claws right through her abdomen, the very area that was still in the midst of healing when he carried her to the riverbank, and him...scratching her face. One of the scratches was so close to her right eye that he could have blinded her had she not turned away on time. He almost blinded and killed the very creature he swore to protect.

His sights moved back to his mate, his hand gently touching her now-healed abdomen, and his fingers gently ran across her now-flawless face. He could still see the scratches he made there in his mind even though they were no longer visible after Lucianne healed and washed off the bloodstains. His breathing got heavy as the memories of the real events came back, and his eyes glistened in hot tears as his heart squeezed in agonizing pain.

Lucianne cupped his cheek and made him look at her. Despite her weakened physique, her voice was still strong when she said, "It wasn't you, Xandar. You would NEVER do that to me. You love me. You and your beast would never hurt me. That wasn't either one of you. It was the decipio-proditors. They manipulated you to do what you did. We'll deal with this. We'll talk to Pelly and Octavia, and we'll end this. Okay?"

Xandar's face was still hard and eyes were still filled with tears. His jaw clenched before his head slowly turned to the left, where Christian was, before his voice came in a low, shivering command, "Tell the empress we're meeting her in her castle within the next hour. I want her entire governing body and security forces ready to meet us. I want full access to every corner of their empire to hunt down the proditors who were here and those they work for. I want every answer to every question we'll have when we land. One absentee, one rejected request, one vague or wrong answer, and I WILL declare war to annihilate EVERY decipio in existence."

“On it,” Christian noted and ran back to get his phone in his trousers among some torn-up garment somewhere.

Lucianne tried to calm Xandar a little by stroking his arm, but it was clear that it wasn't working. He planted a deep kiss on her forehead, and Lucianne felt his hot tears fall on her hair. She cooed, “Shh...I love you. I love you. We'll get through this together. We always will. I love you.”

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0 6 minutes read

Many wolves and lycans were sent to the pack clinic for blood transfusion. Some were so incapacitated by the venom that their friends and allies had to carry them there for treatment. Eighteen wolves and ten lycans, two of whom were Greg's followers and one was Phelton, were in a coma as the Blue Crescent's Chief of Medicine called two ally packs for supplies and asked for extra doctors and nurses. Xandar got Dr Yeil from lycan territory to send over some of his staff members and bring more blood as well.

Seeing how dangerous the proditors were capable of being even in small numbers, the royal family members, defense ministers, Alphas, Lunas and Gammas decided to refrain from sending any trackers along the scent trail of the decipios who got away, for fear of sacrificing the lives of their own people.

The royals and alliance members took quick showers, dressed up and headed for Tate, Toby and Christian's jets with stoned faces. Liam was regretting asking his aunt to come back when he saw how tired she was just through her eyes, which shone less than they normally would. Juan made sure Hale hid all their pups, especially Liam, before Xandar brought Lucianne into the pack house to use the bathroom.

Before they left the pack, Lucianne mustered as much strength and assurance as she could to tell Liam that he did the right thing, and made him promise that if anything like this happened again, he would tell her. He nodded in obedience and waved goodbye as the convoy of cars left Blue Crescent.

On the jet, Xandar placed Lucianne in a window seat before dropping into the seat next to hers as he held her hand. It felt weird, so Lucianne got up and made her space on his lap, where she always sat when they travelled by air. Xandar hesitated. Nonetheless, his strong arms held her in place, careful to avoid touching her abdomen.

Lucianne leaned into his warm, hard chest, and listened to his heart that was beating in a slightly higher-than-average rhythm. Her fingers ran across his chest before she planted a deep kiss over his shirt, where the sound of his heartbeat was the loudest. Xandar's anger subsided just the slightest. His animal was still angered that they were made to harm the very creature they claimed to love the most. What was worse was that the manipulation didn't wipe out one's memories of reality. Hurting his mate, the mother of his daughter, would be an image that would be etched in his mind forever.

He pecked a deep kiss on her forehead in return and uttered, "I love you, baby."

Her tired eyes still sparkled a little when she looked up at him and whispered, "I know, Xandar. I love you, too."

He managed a small smile. "Sleep, sweetheart. We're not reaching there anytime soon. I'll wake you when we land."

"Mm," Lucianne snuggled into him, and he started running his fingers down her hair as she drifted off.

In another two seats on the same jet, Zelena's face was as hard as metal while Zeke continued to stroke her hand and coo her through their link. It was taking every bit of patience for Zelena to not start screaming profanities at the proditors who were no longer in sight.

Lovelace had her fingers pressed against her forehead as she stared out of the window, unable to accept what she did during the battle. Juan apologized to Toby for the third time before the defense minister decided to take a nap after telling the Alpha again that it wasn't his fault to begin with. Azalea replayed the memory over and over again, somehow wishing that she was remembering things wrong.

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They reached castle grounds in less than an hour. The lycan ministers who were not involved in the Blue Crescent battle received an urgent link from Christian, and met them on the castle landing ground. Sir Weaver spotted a very weak Lucianne in the king's arms when the minister was descending the

airstair, and he would have fallen had Lord Yarrington not caught him by his arm and waist.

The two vampire servants who were there to greet them looked hospitable at first, but the moment they saw the murderous faces of the wolves and lycans, they became visibly frightened.

One servant nudged the other as he himself became invisible, courtesy of his defense mechanism. The other servant, who was a velox, fought the urge to sprint away and fidgeted when he forced a smile and said, "R-Right th-this way, Y-Your Highnesses."

Xandar refused to let Lucianne walk. He could still feel that she and her animal were tired even after the short nap, so he carried her as the entire party barged through the entrance. The servant stuttered again when he asked them, or pleaded them rather, to wait while he and his still-invisible colleague informed the empress of their presence.

Lucianne finally managed to convince Xandar to put her down, and she studied the black-and-white tiled floors and cedar-colored walls. The gray ceiling would have made the room very dark if the five chandeliers weren't turned on. Huge portraits of past rulers were hung on the walls. Lucianne began to wonder whether vampire rulers were forbidden from smiling since the late emperors in those portraits looked like they were trying to look more menacing than the other.

Suddenly, everyone heard someone shouting, and their ears perked up to eavesdrop on as much as they could. Those who met Pellethia the other night recognized that it was her voice. "HOW MANY MORE F*CKING DAYS DO YOU NEED TO COME UP WITH A DAMN PLAN?! YOU HAVE MADE ZERO PROGRESS IN THE PAST WEEK! OUR PEOPLE ARE STILL MISSING! YOU REFUSED THE LYCANS' HELP TO FIND THEM! NOW, FOR ALL WE KNOW, THE ONES WHO TOOK OUR OWN ARE THE ONES WHO MADE THE LYCANS AND WEREWOLVES ATTACK EACH OTHER! THEY COULD HAVE LOST THEIR QUEEN TONIGHT!"

There was a blaring sound of a table being slammed before the empress's voice continued ringing angry and strong, "DO YOU IDIOTS HAVE ANY IDEA HOW DIRE OUR SITUATION IS?! IF I HADN'T MET THEIR RULERS IN THEIR PAST LIVES, IF OUR PRESENT RELATIONSHIP DIDN'T START OUT SMOOTHLY, WE'D BE AT WAR RIGHT NOW! YOU'D BEST BELIEVE

IF THAT EVER HAPPENS, I'M SENDING YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES TO THE FRONTLINES FIRST! I DON'T CARE IF THEY CAN'T FIGHT!"

Greg muttered in mild satisfaction, "I'd say we're off to a good start."

Lucianne narrowed her eyes at him at what he termed 'a good start'. The empress was screaming her lungs out. Who knew if she wasn't going to break a few necks soon. Then again, knowing Greg, breaking necks might be termed 'a better start'.

Xandar then uttered in a homicidal tone, "And we're here to make sure that the momentum stays that way."

Lucianne gently hit his chest with the back of her hand to signify her disapproval of what he just said. But he simply took her hand and pecked a sweet kiss on it as Christian patted his shoulder and said, "We will, cuz. We will."

'These cousins,' Lucianne thought to herself as she started boiling, which only simmered down after Xandar pressed a deep kiss on her hairline to cool her down.

"WHAT?!!!" Pellethia shouted when the servants (the discreet servant had to force himself to be visible) bumped their heads through the door, not pleased that she was being disturbed. The servants' legs wobbled when they told her that Lucianne and the others had arrived.

Silence.

Then, the sound of heel-clicking could be heard, along with a pair of shuffled footsteps. Pellethia and Octavia came out of the room, leaving the door slightly ajar and both dashed to stand before Xandar and Lucianne. Lucianne smiled instantly, and wanted to offer Pellethia a hug, but Xandar's large hand held her in place by her waist, waiting for the vampires to extend the greeting first.

Pellethia and Octavia bowed. Lucianne was about to return the gesture but her cold-faced husband held her up, refusing to let her knees bend even by an inch. She started throwing him an annoyed glare before Pellethia began apologizing in a tone that was so different from the one they overheard that a normal creature would think that the one who screamed and the one speaking to them now were two different creatures.

Her emerald eyes amplified guilt when she said, "I don't even know where to begin, Aunt Lucy, Uncle Xandar. I cannot tell you how...embarrassed and sorry I feel that this happened on my watch. Uh...Octavia have I have no issues with giving you and your people full access to look under every nook and cranny of this empire at any time of day. Our governing members, security forces, even the vigils, remain at your disposal. You have full authorization to go wherever you want to, and speak to whoever you wish to."

"Even the prisoners?" Greg asked, surprising everyone present.

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0 4 minutes read

Octavia looked at the duke in confusion when Pellethia said, "Well, if that's necessary, then yes. We can make arrangements for anyone you'd like to see, um..."

Pellethia threw Lucianne a puzzled look, not knowing how to address Greg because she didn't know who he was. Lucianne explained simply, "This is the duke from Xandar's paternal side."

Pellethia nodded in comprehension and finished her sentence from earlier with a courteous nod, "Your Grace."

Curiosity entered her emerald orbs when looked at Greg for a few more moments, feeling his familiar energy, before she stepped towards him and stretched out her hand to ask for his, "May I, Your Grace?"

"What?" Greg questioned with squinted eyes like Pellethia just spoke in another language.

Lucianne murmured his way, "Give her your hand, Your Grace. She'll listen to the rhythm of your blood flow. It'll tell her if you both met in another lifetime."

"What?" Greg asked again, his quizzical look thrown at Lucianne this time.

Xandar's patience was running out, and he glowered at Greg when he said, "Just give her your damn hand, Greg. Stop wasting time. We've got work to do."

As Greg put his hand into the empress's pale one, he answered his cousin, "The fact that we're all still here and not in that chamber up there with those

other bloodsuckers IS wasting time. I would've barged in through those doors without an invitation if I were you."

Lucianne tried to silence him by hissing, "Your Grace, be nice."

"I did plan to be nice, My Queen. But after what happened—"

"Shush!" Lucianne knew how that sentence was going to end, so she abruptly cut him off before he went too far. Yes, they were attacked by vampires, but those were proditors. It wasn't fair to put blame on the empress...or was it?

Pellethia gave Greg back his hand, smiled and said, "Thank you, Your Grace."

Her sights shifted to Lucianne and Xandar again as she gestured towards the stairs leading to the meeting chamber, "Right this way, Aunt Lucy, Uncle Xandar."

Greg paused and said, "Woah woah woah. I let you listen to my blood and now you just want to get on with business without telling me whatever the queen said you were going to tell me."

Lucianne's eyes widened in irritation when she turned to Greg and suggested, "Maybe if you asked nicely, she'll tell you."

Pellethia, who paused in her footsteps the moment Greg started speaking, smirked at him and gave him a look like she was saying 'what's it going to be?' as she patiently waited. Octavia tried to mask her amusement by pressing her lips together but her smiling eyes gave her away.

Greg looked at Lucianne in disbelief. Her firm voice rang through his ears in a hushed tone that only those with the sharpest hearing could catch, "What happened wasn't the rulers' fault, not entirely at least. No one wanted to screw up. We can, and we have, bargained for more help, more access, and more say in this matter. But we do not stoop to the level of bullying this species or any species. We negotiate, we argue, and we fight for our people's best interest. Unless there is clear evidence of wilful ignorance and intentional lack of care, we won't resort to condescending any individual creature to get what we want. Is that clear, Your Grace?"

Greg knew he was supposed to be afraid with those partially-onyx orbs piercing into his soul, but he wasn't. Lucianne's commanding energy just reminded him of why she was the only creature worthy of being the queen in the first place.

Although Lucianne was speaking specifically to Greg, Xandar internalized every word. His lips curled into a soft smile as he fell even more in love with her, and he pecked a kiss in her hair as he muttered affectionately, "As you wish, My Queen."

Greg was brought out of his daze and repeated the same line with a courteous smile. Now, was the hard part: to actually be nice. Bullying was just so much easier. Greg cleared his throat, looked at the empress and said monotonously, "Please."

Lucianne narrowed her eyes and commented, "Really, Greg? Please? That's all you got?"

Pellethia seemed satisfied when she spoke casually as she started walking up the stairs, "Oh, that is a big improvement from his last life, Aunt Lucy. My late father and I failed to fathom how Aunt Rosie managed to hold a conversation with him without exploding. He was always that bad-mouthed person she'd protect me from, and without her smothering the flames, father would've killed him just for the way he spoke."

As Xandar and the others followed Pellethia and Octavia, Xandar asked, "So, who was he?"

"Aunt Rosie's personal bodyguard, Sir Gerald Knightly. He came when Uncle Reagan couldn't. History records that before Uncle Reagan killed his own father, he killed Knightly for failing to uncover the plot to poison Aunt Rosie before she was poisoned."

"Huh." Lucianne noted aloud.

That really was a surprise. Xandar didn't mention anything about Rosalie having a bodyguard when they talked about this, and this was only because Xandar didn't find any material in lycan territory recording such a person.

Xandar and Greg exchanged glances before Greg whispered in frustration, "Who the f*ck are Aunt Rosie and Uncle Reagan?" Lucianne motioned to her and Xandar, and everything started falling into place for Greg.

If that bloody empress was telling the truth, and that damn subject was right, Greg wondered if this constant need to protect Lucianne was because he failed to do just that in the past. He wondered if he pissed her off in their last life like he did in this one. He wondered if he fell in love with her more than a millennium ago like he had fallen for her now.

When they reached the meeting chamber on the first floor, Pellethia pushed open the two doors and stormed in, gesturing the wolves and lycans to the empty seats at the long table on the left. The vampire officials were at the long table on the right. The moment Lucianne sat in the chair that Xandar pulled out for her, she noticed the vampire officials in front of her had bruises and cuts on their faces. Some even had black-eyes.

‘Did Pellethia slam the table with her hands or their heads?’ Lucianne wondered.

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07 minutes read

Christian sat next to Xandar, and Greg sat next to Lucianne. The alliance and remaining ministers took their seats alongside them. Greg followed Lucianne’s worried gaze and noted the vampires’ freshly beaten-up face.

He then muttered her way, “I have a very good feeling about this meeting, My Queen.”

Lucianne tore her eyes away from the vampires and narrowed her eyes at the duke, who tried hard to press back an amused smirk. Toby sat next to Greg just to make sure that if Lucianne needed a good comeback to silence Greg, he would be there to help. But knowing his best friend, she’d most likely wouldn’t need it. Still, one could never be too careful.

Xandar’s anger was seething again at the sight of Maddock, who had still not gotten anywhere since their last encounter. Lucianne reached for his clenched fist on his lap. His fist loosened and their fingers laced together before he pecked a kiss on the back of her hand.

As soon as Pellethia took her seat with Octavia, Rafael and Amber at the four-seater table perpendicularly positioned in between the long tables on the left and right, the empress gave Xandar a firm nod to begin.

Xandar looked Maddock dead in the eye and began with a low voice that would've paralyzed the faint-hearted, "Walk us through every single step of the investigation since we last met, Maddock."

Maddock had a cut near his left eye, and he tried not to glower at Xandar as he gave the details, "I asked for thirteen vigils from Their Imperial Majesties, and sent them to track the scents picked out from Falling Vines. They lost the trail at the Forest of Oderem so I'd say following the scents wasn't a good way to start the investigation to begin with. We invested time there, and we lost more time when there were no results."

Xandar retorted, "And what would you have done if it wasn't to follow the scents?"

"Order a search party, perhaps."

Christian pressed, "In which part of the empire?"

"The vicinity of Falling Vines, and later on, Saber Vagary." Maddock couldn't believe he was being interrogated by creatures less than half his age. What made it worse was that these were low-life lycans!

Lucianne spoke with a sarcastic tone and smile, "Is that so?"

Everyone on her side either leaned back to enjoy the show ahead like Christian and Juan, or sat up in anticipation of what was to come next like Xandar, Greg and Toby. Once Lucianne spoke in that tone with that look, one can be assured that whatever comes out would either be deathly humorous or mercilessly frightening.

Lucianne could see why both Xandar and Toby didn't like Maddock now. "Well, your hindsight must be VERY insightful, Maddock. No one could have POSSIBLY thought to search within the vicinity of the villages upon hearing about the abduction." A few vampires didn't get the sarcasm, and were subtly chuckling at Lucianne when the joke was actually on them.

Maddock knew it was sarcasm, and forced a smile when he uttered less confidently, "We have thought about it and executed it in a timely manner, Your Highness."

Lucianne mocked a bewildered look, but inserted just enough strength in her voice to make it clear that the lycans' inferiority in ruling status did not mean

that they could be stepped on by any figure, “I’m confused, Maddock. Why would you want a solution that you’ve already executed in a timely manner which did not even reap ANY results? At least we gave a trail that led your deployed forces to the Forest of Oderem. Where did your own instructions lead to?”

Silence ensued before Octavia prompted with a hiss, “Answer the queen’s question, Maddock. Stop wasting everyone’s time.”

Maddock swallowed a lump in his throat and answered in a meek voice, “Only around the village.” Maddock cleared his throat to muster a little more confidence when he spoke again, “I...apologize for what I said earlier, Your Highnesses.”

Toby and Christian would have applauded if they were allowed to. Lucianne wasn’t celebrating just yet. Her voice projected strength and demanded respect when it echoed in the chamber, “The best apology is a changed attitude, Maddock. We shall see if you’re capable of that. With regards to the investigation, is it safe to say that you didn’t personally join the vigils?”

Maddock tried to walk around answering the question, “That’s...not how we handle things here, Your Highness. I’m an administrator. I don’t go on these expeditions. Not anymore, that is. My job is simply to find the best creatures for the task. I’ve long retired from being on the field.” Almost everyone could see the embarrassment on the vampires’ faces by that answer.

Xandar couldn’t hold back the low snarl when he leaned forward and questioned in a deadly low voice, “So, as the administrator who led the investigation, you have so little insight as to what happened...no insight, in fact, that you wouldn’t have the slightest hint of how twenty-eight of my people are in a coma, thirty are hoping that they won’t join the twenty-eight while they wait for blood from allies, and you have ZERO idea of who was behind forcing me to almost...kll...my wife? Is my understanding correct?”

The chill from Xandar’s voice made some of the younger vampires shudder, even though they themselves were older than the king. The atmosphere was never this tense since the war more than 204 years ago when the vampires used this chamber to discuss the stages of attack and strategize their troops.

The vigils who stood in a row behind the governing ministers prayed to their Lord that the king wouldn't declare war. Their families really couldn't fight. There wasn't a need to learn since the truce. But from the way Xandar was speaking, many knew that the truce might just be coming to an end.

Lucianne stroked Xandar's tightened grip with her thumb, and her free hand reached out to stroke his forearm as she whispered, "Xandar, I agree that none of this is okay. But, please, there's still a way. They can still help us. We just haven't found the right creatures to ask yet. Let's find the ones who can give us answers. Let's find THE way. What do you say?"

Xandar tore his onyx eyes away from Maddock, who was turning whiter than he already was with each passing second. Every fiber and bone in Xandar's body was ready to tell his wife that enough was enough, that these creatures were given enough time and came back with nothing, that there was no point in wasting more time to find 'the way'.

But the moment Lucianne's soft and assuring orbs held his onyx ones captive, the king miraculously forgot what he was supposed to say as his features softened. Like his animal had been trained, he took a few slow, deep breaths to calm himself as he focused on Lucianne's comforting touch on his hand and arm, before ultimately pecking a kiss on her forehead and muttering, "Okay."

Another kiss on her cheek, and he peered into her eyes and added with a smirk when lilac shades started returning to his orbs, "You didn't play fair, sweetheart."

That earned him a smile from his mate when she whispered rhetorically, "How do you think I almost always win, darling?"

"Mm. You're a cunning one, aren't you?"

"The one you marked and married. What were you thinking?" The lilac shades were clearing the onyx ones in his eyes. He was almost stable, so Lucianne continued playing along.

Xandar scoffed, and his eyes regained its full lilac color the moment his smile widened when he declared in a soft but firm voice, "There was nothing to think about, my love. There has only ever been and will only ever be you."

Lucianne managed to hold back her tears when her heart melted from his words, but she could neither control her blushing cheeks nor suppress her broadening smile at his statement.

A few vigils even sighed in relief at Xandar calming down, and this sight did not please Toby or the rest of the alliance members. Greg even muttered, "Lucky bastards." Toby couldn't help but agree. The vampires should be groveling on the ground thanking the queen right now for saving their a.sses. This party was not over yet.

After Lucianne was sure that her husband's temperament was stable, her face turned business-like serious when she proceeded to speak to the vampires, "Those who were personally involved in the investigation, please come forward."

The thirteen vigils who were recently suspended took a step forward with still-terrified eyes. Lucianne asked, "Which one of you led the tracking?"

A ginger-haired man took another step forward and said, "That would be me, ma'am."

Lucianne nodded and began, "Your name?"

He seemed surprised. Normally, officials merely asked for his code, which would be VIG 001. He couldn't remember the last time he was asked for a name by someone of higher authority. He blinked before answering, "Duica, Your Highness."

Lucianne gave a firm nod in acknowledgment and began, "Duica, walk us through the investigation. Tell us about any and every odd detail along the trail."

Every odd detail? He exchanged a puzzled look with his comrades before he sheepishly admitted, "I'm sorry, Your Highness. I don't understand."

He was surprised that Lucianne didn't sigh in exasperation like the empress would. The queen merely explained what she meant with no fuss, "What stood out when you and your team went down the trail or when you were in the old castle next to the forest? Did any of you see, hear, smell or feel anything that was unusual for a vampire territory? Perhaps one of you sensed a presence or heard a sound when you didn't expect to? Did the forest emit any scents when you were within its proximity?"

A wave of comprehension washed over the twenty-six vigils, and Duica mind-linked those who joined him that day before they exchanged firm nods. He then glanced nervously at the empress, then back at Lucianne, cleared his throat and spoke, "In the abandoned castle, when we were at the castle window next to the Forest of Oderem, we detected a scent that matched...the empress."