

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 61 - Tips

0 6 minutes read

Octavia was the first to exclaim, "WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU SUGGESTING?! THAT THE EMPRESS ABDUCTED HER OWN PEOPLE?!"

Lucianne asked a little more calmly, "Yes, Duica. What are you suggesting? Was this only detected at the window?"

Duica gulped and tried his best not to shake when he said, "No, in fact. It was..." he looked to his comrades for support, who all gave him an ominous nod for him to disclose the whole truth, so he did, "We realized that it was the empress's scent at the window, but when we sniffed the rest of the castle, we found that the scent was...in every room and corridor."

Before anyone could say anything, Lucianne commented in a pondering manner, "Odd." She turned to a still-shocked Pellethia and asked, "You've never been there, have you, Pelly?"

Some relief entered Pellethia's confused eyes when she said, "No, I've never even seen it."

"Very odd," Lucianne muttered.

Everyone heard the contemplation in her voice. Almost every wolf and lycan, and even some of the vampires, were starting to suspect that the empress and her consort were the real culprits all along. The only ones who were sure of their innocence were Lucianne, Xandar, Rafael and Amber. Greg was on the fence on this one. He didn't have enough information to decide.

Lucianne turned to Greg and asked aloud, "Greg, can scent sprays be...custom-made to match a very specific creature, like the empress, for example?"

Greg thought about this before he said, "Not to my knowledge, My Queen. But I must admit that it is not impossible, with an empress's close associate and with a very high fee due to the risks and dangers of getting caught using the scent of a ruler to cover their tracks."

Toby voiced out his view, "Lucy, it couldn't be scent sprays. By the time the vigils got to the castle, any of it would've vanished, wouldn't it?"

Greg pointed at Toby and said, "That would be right, unless the empress's scent was sprayed there a lot later, after they received word that a search party had been sent down that trail."

Xandar offered an alternative suggestion, "Perhaps it wasn't synthetic scent sprays to begin with, but the natural one?"

Pellethia's eyes widened in disbelief when she thought Xandar was suggesting that she was there in person when she wasn't. Octavia was about to defend her wife again before Xandar proceeded to say, "Perhaps the scent was naturally produced by the Forest of Oderem, then diffused into the castle through the window."

Upon hearing this, Greg thought aloud, "So, what you're saying is that the empress had never been to the abandoned castle, but she's been to the forest for it to replicate her scent?"

The vampires glowered at Greg like he just said something offensive. Lucianne quickly explained, "Greg, I doubt Her Imperial Majesty had been there. No ruler has. The only member of the imperial family who did was Count Dracula, who is...not the most celebrated vampire in history, so following in his footsteps to enter the Forest of Oderem is considered...a sin in most regions of the empire. Plus, due to the...incomprehensible mystery of the forest, there's an unspoken rule that any emperor, empress, consort and heir to the throne never visit that place."

"Oh," Greg noted simply, and looked at Pellethia again before casually saying, "Pardon me. I'm not well-versed in forest voodooos."

Lucianne hissed softly, "Greg!"

Octavia then said, "It's alright, Lucy. Off the record, we call it a voodoo here, too." Greg looked at Lucianne with feigned innocence and his hand motioned in Octavia's way, his way of saying that he didn't say wrong.

A few vampires were impressed with Lucianne's knowledge, and were touched by the respect she had for their culture and taboos, even the undecipherable ones. Some of them were even beginning to grow fond of her despite what she did to Maddock. But they were unanimously getting very annoyed with Greg's insensitivity.

Lucianne only calmed down with Xandar stroking her hand as he continued speaking, “The prime mystery of the forest is that its curses can reach to the far corners of the empire, even those who’ve never stepped foot there, and it’s still a mystery of how it can replicate EVERY scent. It may even include scents that have never touched its soil. But why would it do so remains the question.”

Amber’s brows furrowed in frustration when she said, “If only we knew, Your Highness. Our guess is as good as yours, that it’s doing it to confuse us – the authorities.”

Toby asked, “If that’s true, why did it specifically copy the empress’s scent? Why didn’t it spray something that matched, excuse me for suggesting, yours, Duica’s or even Maddock’s?”

Amber exchanged a nervous look with Rafael. She and everyone else were made fully aware about Xandar’s threat to declare war if they gave vague or incomplete answers. After swallowing a lump in her throat, she sheepishly admitted, “I want to give you the answers, minister. I really do. But the forest is not something that any of us can understand.”

“Except for those who used it to escape,” Greg suddenly mentioned.

Amber agreed, “That’s true, Your Grace. But those who used it to escape have escaped. We don’t have anyone to ask.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure about that. Someone in prison might know something.”

“I doubt it. Those were put there for petty crimes that were nowhere near the forest.”

Greg scoffed and said, “This is where those of us in the rogue world have an upper-hand. For some reason, you authoritative figures often believe that we operate solo when the fact is most of us don’t. But, of course, I speak for lycans. I don’t know if proditors are accustomed to doing things as a team but the events in Blue Crescent today show us that, accustomed or not, rogue vampires who can work in a team do exist. And rogue teams that can work together are dangerous at best and lethal at worst.”

Rafael then mentioned, “We do catch burglars working in teams of three from time to time, and crimes similar to those. But there are still some who work

alone. In essence, whether proditors are indeed...communicating with one another and cooperating seems...varied from the records.”

“Records show you nothing.” Greg gave up trying to explain the obvious, so he turned to Lucianne, and firmly declared, “We need someone on the inside who knows something, if not everything, My Queen.”

Lucianne looked at Xandar like she was asking for permission, which he gave with a small smile and a subtle nod before Lucianne turned back to Greg and said, “I don’t disagree, Greg. But, knowing how rogues operate, I have a feeling that we aren’t going to play fair. So, I must ask: how are we going to get them to tell the whole truth?”

Greg spoke casually, “Well, if the Empress’s Authority is out of the question, then torture should work. It has been effective on lycans.”

Lucianne’s eyes widened, but not for the noble reason of not wanting to torture another being. She shook her head as she said, “We are NOT doing that. The books say that the forest offers its followers some sort of protection. Whoever tortures its followers receives the same form of torture in return. They have this protection mark on their nape that only becomes visible when it’s too late. It’s not a legend. It’s hist—”

Greg slumped back into his seat and finished for her, “History. Damn that subject. Stupid forest.” Xandar used to be fascinated with the forest, but now, even he shared Greg’s frustration.

Lucianne continued cracking her head, and when an idea came, she asked Xandar, “Just to clarify, dearest, the books said nothing about non-vampires getting cursed?”

“Not from our archives,” His sights then went to Pellethia who confirmed, “Not from our archives either.”

Lucianne nodded, then looked back-and-forth between Xandar and Greg when she speedily muttered, “For the record, I’m only changing my mind now because I can’t see another way.”

Before Greg or Xandar could process what she meant, she told Pellethia and Octavia, “Let us enter the Forest of Oderem.”

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 62 - Tips

0 6 minutes read

“NO!” Lucianne didn’t know how many creatures growled that word her way, but their combined volume was enough to make her animal cover its ears in discomfort.

Xandar turned Lucianne to face him, and gently shook her by her forearms as he reminded her, “Babe, when we talked about this, we said we’re putting our prisoners there, NOT YOU.”

“The prisoners won’t necessarily do things our way or ask what we want, darling.”

Juan exclaimed, “Lucy, are you out of your mind?! No one knows how that thing works and you just want to trespass like it was your own territory?”

Lucianne argued meekly, “Well, we’re not trespassing if we have the forest’s permission.”

Greg was close to exploding when he asked, “How the f*ck do we even get that?! And you didn’t think of bringing this up earlier, My Queen?”

Xandar wasn’t done either. “What about our daughter? Didn’t you say it might affect Reida?”

“I don’t think it will affect her or anyone else adversely in our case. It’s like Greg said before, we’re just trying to understand the forest. I understand where he was coming from now. The forest might really feel flattered and give us what we’re looking for, some proditor hideout that no authoritative figure has access to or something like that.”

Xandar threw Greg a glare for putting that thought into Lucianne’s head. Greg was pissed too. “My Queen, putting what I said that way isn’t fair. Like this cousin of mine, I suggested putting prisoners there. Or humans. Disposable creatures who are better off disposed of. You, as I’m sure everyone will agree, DO NOT qualify.”

Lucianne wasn’t giving up. “Think about it, Xandar. Every historical curse took effect AFTER a ruler sought to destroy the forest in one way or another. There’s nothing in history that says one died of an unknown disease or had someone they loved taken from them by simply passing through with no ill intentions.”

Greg argued, "Didn't you mention that no guards are stationed there because it'll emit some sort of lethal odor, my Queen?"

She turned to her cousin-in-law and argued, "Yes, because the guards weren't just passing through. They were there 24/7. How would you feel if someone watched you 24/7, Greg, someone who controls who comes to see you and invades your space as and when they please?"

Greg refused to answer that question because it would only give Lucianne the upper hand, so he glowered at his cousin and uttered, "Even the most insignificant speck of dust in the kingdom knows that you're powerless when it comes to our queen, but for the love of Goddess, don't pick this time to be powerless, cousin. She CANNOT be allowed to go there."

"I don't need you to tell me that," Xandar addressed Greg with a subtle growl before speaking to his stubborn wife much more gently, "Alright, babe. How about this? We'll send someone else in there for a test run. If what you're saying is true, that it's safe, we go in. Deal?"

Lucianne looked at him in suspicion and asked, "Who are you suggesting?"

Pellethia offered, "I have 26 vigils at my disposal, Aunt Lucy."

Lucianne's eyes widened in shock, and she caught a few vigils flinching at what the empress just said. She then stated the problem with that suggestion, "Pelly, the idea is to send non-vampires."

Octavia argued, "We heard that, Lucy. But if all that is needed to keep harm at bay is to enter the forest without intending to destroy it, then it wouldn't matter what species we send in there, don't you think?"

None of the werewolves and lycans were onboard with letting Lucianne go either, so the queen was on her own when she tried to persuade the vampire rulers to reconsider, "We're talking about sending your most trusted investigators, Octavia."

Pellethia immediately questioned, "So? You've said so yourself, Aunt Lucy, if they're just passing through with no intention to demolish the forest or stay for an extended period of time, they'd be fine, right?"

The lycans and wolves were internally grateful that Pellethia was on their side in this, especially Xandar. Pellethia just got back the person she thought was lost forever. She wasn't going to let Lucianne put herself in unnecessary danger now that she had the power to protect her in a way that she couldn't do with Rosalie.

The chamber fell into dead silence as they waited for Lucianne's answer. Her eyes studied the 26 vigils. Some of them might have families, spouses, perhaps even children. But what assured her was that even those who flinched earlier showed no fear now, only a readiness to serve. They reminded her of her and her friends before battles, a readiness to fight and die trying. She thought about what she told everyone, going through whatever she knew about the forest, and concluded that it should be safe.

After what seemed like an eternity later, Lucianne sighed in defeat and uttered, "Fine. Okay."

Those holding their breaths heaved an audible sigh of relief. Greg slowly leaned back into his chair and muttered under his breath, "Goddess, this creature takes stubbornness to a whole new level."

Toby found himself responding, "Well, now you know how we all feel in such situations, Your Grace." Even he was surprised by what came out of his mouth. The minister expected to speak against this duke for Lucianne, not the other way around.

But everyone jolted upright when Lucianne started speaking again, "But don't send them all at once, Pelly. Maybe two at a time, and don't wander too deep in at one-go. Take it slow. Maybe the first pair could go as far as six feet in, the second pair could go ten feet, something like that?"

Pellethia turned to her vigils and yelled, "Heard that?!"

"Yes, Your Majesty," they bowed and uttered in unison.

Pellethia's voice softened when her sights returned to the king and queen. "We'll start executing that plan tomorrow."

"And two days after that," Xandar insisted.

Before Lucianne could argue, Octavia uttered in agreement with a firm nod, "And two days after that."

A woman with dark hair that reached her shoulders asked, “Your Majesty, wouldn’t that length of time put our own people at risk? Another village might be abducted by then!”

Octavia and Pellethia scowled at the woman at the same time before Octavia responded, “And what do you suggest we do, Vienna? Dismiss investigating the forest and wait while all our people become susceptible to abduction?”

After coming to terms that there was no way out but to back-out, Vienna swallowed her pride and said, “I...apologize for the...unhelpful opinion, Your Majesties, Your Highnesses. Forgive my intrusion that was...given without...proper thought on my part.”

Without hesitation, Pellethia declared, “You’re suspended for the rest of the week after this meeting, Vienna.”

“Understood, Your Majesty,” Vienna said with relief because she and many others thought that she was going to be permanently dismissed after what she said.

When that was settled, Pellethia faced the lycans and werewolves again as she asked, “Would there be anything else to discuss for now?”

Toby raised his hand and asked, “Can we borrow a few decipios and discretus to guard Blue Crescent?”

“Of course, minister.” Pellethia obliged with a smile and signaled a team of six custodes (guards), who complied to her silent command with a bow.

Octavia then suggested, “Perhaps it’s best if we sent a few to all of your packs, minister, just to be safe.”

The wolves and lycans looked at Octavia wide-eyed. But Pellethia gently squeezed her consort’s hand with a grateful smile.

Toby asked in genuine worry, “Do you have enough to spare, Your Majesty? Your territory isn’t exactly...proditor-proof yet.”

Octavia grinned at Toby’s consideration and said, “Well, minister, I must admit that our species will be spread very thin across your packs, perhaps only two of each kind in each pack other than Blue Crescent. They will only act as a pair of eyes to see what wolves and lycans cannot. Some of them might not

have the sufficient skills to fight, so the burden of fighting must still be borne by your people, I'm afraid. With the abduction threat still present and our limited population, that's all we can offer to help secure the safety of your sp—

Before he could finish, Zelena exclaimed gratefully, "It's more than enough!"

Juan agreed, "Yes, that really is all we need – a pair of eyes that can see something that we can't. Thank you, Your Majesties."

Lovelace and Tate thanked them, too. Every Alpha and Luna's scowl were replaced with grateful smiles. The cold and distant atmosphere lifted, and everyone felt a form of connection that they never imagined being established with vampires.

Just when Pellethia thought that was all, Rafael leaned in and whispered something into her ear. When he was done, he waited for her answer. Pellethia's eyebrows furrowed and forehead creased as she reminded Rafael with concerned eyes, "Just be...very gentle and careful with how you're going to phrase things."

Rafael nodded with a nervous smile, and looked at the king and queen before he cleared his throat and asked, "What I'm about to say is going to be potentially triggering for some...or for everyone uh..." he chose his next words even more carefully, "When the decipios...manipulated...what did it feel like, Your Highnesses?"

With Rafael's question, the lightened atmosphere that took a lot of time and effort to reach was effectively tossed out of the window.

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 63 - Tips

0 5 minutes read

With the rising tension in the pindrop silence chamber, the other decipios in the room shrunk further into their seats despite not having anything to do with the attack in Blue Crescent. They simply felt ashamed of sharing that innate power with those who caused the diplomatic conflict.

Xandar's grip on Lucianne's small hand tightened when he explained, "It was a nightmare. I felt like I was being caged at first then released into a world that is supposed to be real but really isn't. When the manipulation started taking effect, what I saw around me were only enemies, creatures that we've put

behind bars and in solitary confinement less than a year ago. My friends and family who were fighting alongside me miraculously disappeared from sight. My wife...was missing.”

He paused for a moment to be conscious of Lucianne’s thumb stroking his hand, to make sure that she was really there with him before he continued, “Some part of me felt that she was in danger, that she was hurt, and I had to find her but the purported enemies were standing in my way. The worst part? When Lucy was right in front of me, I didn’t see her. I saw Kelissa Kylton, the very creature that did everything within her reach to hurt my mate with the goal of being crowned. When the manipulation effects wore off and I started remembering, it was an even worse nightmare because I remember every detail of what I did to my allies, and worst of all, to my mate.”

Juan, Lovelace, Azalea and every other creature who had been manipulated to turn against their friends could easily relate to what Xandar said. But no one dared suggest or could deny that what Xandar and Zelena went through were the worst. They were both manipulated to hurt their respective mates with the goal of k!lling them.

Xandar looked away from Rafael and everyone else as he pressed away the hot tears from the corners of his eyes and focused on Lucianne’s voice cooing him through their link, ‘It wasn’t you, Xandar. It was the proditors. It really wasn’t you, darling, please. You and your animal wouldn’t have done that had you both known what was going on.’

Xandar’s head snapped to hers when whisper-yelled, “But we should have known, Lucy!”

Her soft and assuring orbs peered into his when she whispered, “It’s a power that none of us of this generation is familiar with yet. It really isn’t your fault. Now that we know a little more about it, we might just be able to find a way around it. There might be a weak sp0t somewhere or a defense mechanism that no book has taught us yet. We’ll find a way, okay?”

“It’s an archaic power that’s as old as the King’s Authority, Lucy. No one has ever found a way around it. What if we can’t find a way?” Xandar questioned in worry and dismay. What he really was asking was: what if he was made to k!ll her? The thought of Lucianne dying by his hands shot an excruciating pain right to his heart. It constricted the veins in his being and strangulated his

soul, making it so suffocating that his animal curled up into a tight ball just to cope with the torment.

Lucianne felt his fear, his anguish. Even so, she looked at him with determined eyes, and declared, "If we can't find a way, we'll CREATE a way, Xandar. Another first, right?"

Xandar could feel the power in her voice despite it being softer than usual, and a smile slowly graced his hopeless features. The tormenting thoughts stopped, and he could breathe again. Her determination gave him hope.

As the fear and agony subsided, he leaned in and pecked a kiss on her nose before conceding, "Right. Another first." A quick kiss on her lips before he muttered, "You're amazing."

After trying and failing to suppress her blushes and shy smile, she gently pushed her husband back into his seat. Her eyes went to Rafael but when she opened her mouth, Rafael immediately said, "If you'd prefer not to describe it, Your High-ness," his voice cracked at Lucianne's title, and he cleared his throat before he continued speaking while one of his legs shook under the table, "I completely understand. Perhaps that was a very inappropriate question to ask."

So much for wanting to help. If the king's answer could turn the faces of warm-blooded creatures stone-cold when he was only manipulated by four proditors, imagine what the queen's answer was going to do when her mind was invaded by ten! Rafael prayed to Lord that he didn't just ask a question that could further jeopardize diplomatic relations or, Lord forbid, start a war. His best friend would probably kill him before he even made it to the frontlines.

Christian then questioned with as much diplomacy as he could muster, "I don't mean to be rude, Rafael, but if you knew it was inappropriate, then why pose the question in the first place?"

Rafael was thankful that Christian didn't make him feel even more intimidated, and explained apologetically, "In all honesty, Your Grace, I was trying to assess the level of skill of those who were there, to see what we're all up against."

Greg had the most brilliant sarcastic retort to assert that whatever Rafael just said was complete bullsh*t, but before the words came out, Lucianne spoke to Rafael, “Then let’s assess that together.”

Greg, in effect, had to deliberately shut his opening mouth. Being nice was getting painful.

Rafael wasn’t even subtle in taking a breath and holding it as Lucianne began, “When the manipulation started, it felt like my mind walked into a wall, and when I turned, I just knocked into another wall, then another, and another. It was like they were trying to close my mind to all possibilities but one – the one they wanted me to see. My animal and I kept pushing back, because we could...sense that the route they were pushing our minds towards wasn’t the right one.”

Rafael’s eyebrows pulled together when he asked in disbelief, “You could ‘sense’ the manipulation, Your Highness?”

Lucianne replayed the mental attack and said, “I think so. You see, my animal’s sense of smell could tell that what the proditors wanted to make me see wasn’t what’s real. They were trying to get me to see that Draxon and the vampires were Xandar and my family and allies. The only problem was that Draxon and the vampires didn’t smell anything like Xandar and my allies, even though they looked like them in my head. And the other problem is that the illusion didn’t exude the warmth that I’d normally feel with my loved ones. It just felt cold and suspicious. My animal could sense that my eyes weren’t seeing what’s real, and I just...trusted her.”

There was a moment of stunned silence before Rafael turned to Pellethia and said out loud with wide eyes, “So, it’s true then, Pelly. They really can sense the manipulation. We haven’t heard of a creature who could do that since Bernard IV and his fifty espions. And that was...” he slumped back into his seat to do a mental count and exclaimed, “...more than two millennia ago!”

Lucianne leaned closer to her husband and asked, “Bernard IV?”

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 64 - Tips

0 6 minutes read

Xandar met Lucianne’s orbs that were sparkling with curiosity before he smiled at the beautiful sight and ran his fingers down her soft hair as he explained, “Bernard IV was the Director-General of the Secret Service that

used to exist, sweetheart. The Service started with him, who took in creatures of any species as long as they possessed enough aptitude, attitude, mental stamina, emotional stability and psychological mastery. They operated independent of governments and monarchies, loyal only to civilians but...

He took an uneasy gaze around the room and continued, "His successor didn't possess the same vision or nobility that he had, and soon, it became evident that politics played a role in how the Secret Service operated."

Lucianne looked around, and then back at her slightly guilty husband and said, "Let me guess, his successor was a lycan?"

Xandar gave a slow nod, staring at her fingers he was clinging onto as he uttered, "And the lycan was his daughter." Lucianne's mouth gaped open while the rest of the wolves and lycans tried their best to keep their shock to themselves.

The vampires were becoming even more impressed with this royal couple. They definitely feared them now that they had met, but some part of them couldn't help but...like them. If it were another Lycan King or Queen, they'd definitely turn defensive at any information that tarnished a lycan's reputation. Xandar and Lucianne were, oddly, not doing anything close to that.

Rafael quickly added after Xandar, "It wouldn't be fair to blame the lycans as a whole for the successor's...incompetence, Your Highnesses. Bernard IV was a lycan as well, and things went great! He became a legend!"

Xandar forced a smile and said, "That's very kind of you to say, Rafael. But the fact is as quickly as something legendary was built by a lycan, it was also quickly demolished by another lycan."

He turned to his queen and completed the story, "The rulers of every species in existence reached a unanimous decision to dissolve the Service. And that was the end of it."

In the quiet, devastating atmosphere of loss, Greg suddenly commented with a gleaming smile, "Finally. Something about the damn subject that's worth learning about." Even his animal paid attention to a historical tale without effort for once.

Xandar then pointed out the obvious, "About sensing a decipio's manipulation...I've never read about such a thing."

Rafael chuckled and said, "We're not taught that over here either, Your Highness. But, in the unpublished royal archives, now in faded ink, it says that Bernard IV and his espions were the only ones who had abilities that others did not, and not because they were born that way, but were trained that way. So, Your Highness," his eyes shifted to Lucianne when he expressed his enthusiasm, "I would very much like to know how you trained your senses to smell things that others cannot."

All eyes fell on Lucianne, who had to disappoint them when she said, "Well, my sense of smell had always been a little better than most, Rafael. You see, I can smell things like silver, oleander and mercury, substances that are scientifically proven to have no distinct odor. I'm...born this way. So, I guess I don't qualify to be an espionne in The Secret Service if it still existed today."

Rafael continued questioning, "Does it also mean that, for usual scents, you are innately born to smell them better?"

"Uh...I...don't know?" Lucianne muttered obliviously. How did one even measure that?

Rafael got to thinking, and when his eyes went to Pellethia's cup of red liquid, a smile spread across his serious face. He took her cup away, earning an annoyed, "Raf, that's mine!" from the empress, which he ignored when he asked Lucianne, "Can you smell this, Your Highness?"

Greg had his arms crossed when he shook his head in disapproval of what Rafael was doing, and said, "Don't patronize her. It has to be blood."

Lucianne immediately said, "It's not."

Her friends and family stared at her when Greg blinked. His eyes widened as he studied the queen's face that was nothing less than sure.

"It's not?" Greg asked more in disbelief of her smelling abilities rather than the disbelief of the drink not being blood.

"Of course it's not. Blood scent would have circulated in any room. We've been here for more than an hour. No one smelled anything yet. There's no way that's blood. What it smells like is more of..." Lucianne turned to the cup

as she started sniffing from where she sat, "...raspberry, strawberry and a whiff of...something fizzy. What is it, Pelly?"

"Phosphoric acid, Aunt Lucy."

"Ah. New one." Lucianne took a mental note.

Greg digested her unusual ability and muttered, "A very new one."

Lucianne then asked Rafael, "Anyway, do you mean to say that we just might be able to defend ourselves with our noses...and other senses?"

"I do believe that it's possible, Your Highness. And the good news is that the decipios who attacked weren't even that skilful, so—"

"Weren't even that skilful?" Xandar questioned.

Christian went on, "And those decipios are considered good news?"

Rafael's mouth promptly shut, and Lucianne stroked Xandar's hand as she explained, "Perhaps what Rafael was trying to say is that with the most basic practice, we'd be able to go around their...mind-attack, darling. That's good news. We don't have to train very long to protect ourselves."

Without peeling his eyes off Rafael, he pecked a kiss on his wife's hand before he asked, "And what is a skilful decipio like, Rafael?"

Xandar, Christian and Toby remembered their conversation with him and Amber at Falling Vines, about Rafael being the most powerful decipio in the empire. If anyone could provide an insight on manipulation powers, it would be him.

Rafael's sights instinctively went to Lucianne, who gave him an encouraging nod as he explained, "Well, a skilled one would be able to enter your minds slowly and subtly to avoid detection for as long as possible. From whatever you've both just told us, Your Highnesses, it seems like these never...bothered to enhance their innate ability. They barged right into your minds. Only below average players do that. And instead of building walls and caging you in your own minds, a very good decipio would be able to slither his way in. Less effort, better results."

"That's amazing!" Lucianne praised in awe.

If it was anyone else who said that, Xandar would've torn off that creature's head and thrown it out of the window or, if he was feeling civilized, he would use his royal prerogative to subject the creature to solitary confinement for the rest of its living days. Since this was his little freesia, all Xandar could do was sigh in despair at her amazement of the very power that almost killed her, and mutter, "No, baby. It's not. It's deadly."

"Well, I'm not saying that it's not dangerous, Xandar. But to have the ability to manipulate someone without them knowing just opens up a whole new level!"

"One that I hope we won't have to unlock, my love."

"Better to unlock it now than later, don't you think?" Lucianne asked.

Toby muttered, "I knew this was coming."

Christian questioned in suspicion, "What is?"

Greg rolled his eyes because, unlike his distant cousin, he knew what Toby meant. Those infected with the Blackfur gene were just so slow.

Toby exchanged a knowing glance with his best friend and said, "Lucy is going to get Xandar to agree that we should practice with a few skillful devious over the next few days or weeks to be ready for the next attack. Can't believe she's already getting my vote on this even before she said the words."

Rafael was the most excited. "I have no problem with volunteering in these practice sessions, Your Highnesses!" His enthusiasm was not shared by many of his own but he didn't care. If neither Pellethia nor Octavia stopped him, he was going to go with it.

Juan murmured, "Well, better now than later." Similar murmurs spread amongst them, especially the pack leaders.

Lucianne looked at Xandar with doe eyes as she awaited his decision, and the king sighed in defeat before pecking a kiss between her eyebrows as he repeated everyone's words, "Better now than later, then."

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 65 - Tips

06 minutes read

Toby agreed to discuss with Tate about the practice schedules and make arrangements with Rafael. The meeting was dismissed, and everyone went home. Xandar and Lucianne picked Reida up from Christian and Annie's place and put her into bed before getting into bed themselves.

As soon as Lucianne made her space in Xandar's arms and was about to drift off, Xandar kissed her forehead and muttered, "I am so sorry, Lucy."

She looked up at him with droopy eyes and murmured, "Darling, again, it's not your fault. It's not his fault either."

Her hand traced his cheekbone, making his animal coo as it made Xandar pressed his forehead against hers. She continued whispering, "Stop blaming yourselves and each other. Neither of you would have done such a thing. We found a way to solve this. Let's just focus on being better, being more than what we are now, okay?"

A kiss on her lips, and he muttered, "Mm-kay."

Just when she was going to fall asleep again, Xandar murmured, "At least I saw your tail glow when you used your Authority today, and it was beautiful." A sweet peck on her nose, and he muttered, "Night, sweetheart."

His eyelids fell when Lucianne's eyes shot wide open. "My tail what?!"

Without waiting for Xandar to answer, she detached herself from his loose embrace and got out of bed, earning an annoyed groan from her mate who was about to surrender to fatigue with her in his arms.

After Lucianne took off her panties and oversized shirt, she shifted in the middle of their bedroom. Xandar thanked Goddess that she wasn't very large for a lycan and the empty space in their bedroom was enough to accommodate her size.

He watched her study her own tail as she channeled her Authority. The thickest stripe of the tail emitted a faint blue glow, and when she strengthened her power, it emitted a brighter blue glow. What was odd was that none of the other stripes were glowing, not even a little.

"Beautiful," Xandar muttered at the sight.

Lucianne was still staring, unable to believe what she was looking at. When her husband got impatient, he prompted, "C'mon, babe. Neither of us need a night light to sleep. Just turn that thing off, shift back and come back to bed."

Her animal threw him a smirk before Lucianne shifted back and put on the shirt and panties. She then stayed rooted in her spot, muttering to herself, "I wonder if I've missed anything on species peculiarities in that book."

Right when she was about to leave the bedroom and head for her reading wonderland to check on that fact, Xandar leaped out of bed and stopped her at the door, scooping her up before putting her back into bed, caging her between his arms, where he said, "It's late, baby. Sleep."

"I just need to check on something, Xandar. It won't take very long." Try as she might, she couldn't escape his tight grip around her small body.

Xandar bluntly responded, "Baby, we both know that's a lie. Once you step foot into your wonderland, you'd be gone for hours! Besides, don't we have a private rendezvous with Pelly and Octavia tomorrow morning?"

"But I need answers! How can you sleep after seeing that?!"

His eyes peered into hers when he firmly declared, "I can sleep because I know that you and our daughter are safe. We can start answer-searching tomorrow. Besides, I doubt you overlooked anything in the books. You flagged every page and highlighted every fact that stood out. The books aren't going anywhere, Lucy. Just sleep."

After coming to terms that her exhausted physique was not going to enable her to escape her husband's strong grip, she gave in with a reluctant 'Fine'. He planted a deep kiss between her eyebrows, then positioned his nose right above her hair to take in her scent as he drifted off. Lucianne let herself relax by concentrating on the assuring rhythm of Xandar's beating heart, and she too surrendered to the darkness.

###

They were both woken up by the device complemented to the detector in Reida's cot at 3:54 am. Reida was crying, demanding a diaper change, so the sleepy couple sped to the nursery next door and spent the next few minutes

cleaning her up, changing her sheets and blankets, and putting her back to sleep.

As soon as Reida's breathing rhythm showed that she was in dreamland once more, Lucianne whispered to Xandar, "I think I'm just going to take a short nap."

"Thank Goddess," Xandar murmured.

Ever since they had Reida, Lucianne's habit of waking up at 4 a.m. wasn't an everyday thing anymore. Xandar still found it amazing that she could make it an almost-everyday thing.

They went back to bed, and were woken up the second time by the doorbell. Lucianne gasped when she saw the time. It was close to seven! Their meet-up with Pelly and Octavia was less than an hour away! Xandar opened the door to let Mrs Parker in while Lucianne took a quick shower and got ready. She then handed Reida to Mrs Parker, and dashed through making breakfast for Xandar and herself while he got ready. They kissed Reida goodbye and had their breakfast on the jet.

The king and queen were ten minutes late for their meet-up when they landed on castle grounds in better spirits than the night before. Lucianne wrapped Pellethia in a hug before Xandar did anything to stop her. Xandar shook Octavia's hand with a warm smile, and the four headed for the castle garden. Octavia and Xandar were fully aware that Lucianne and Pellethia would like to speak privately, so they wandered off a different route from the queen and empress.

Octavia started their conversation as they strolled down the paving stone pathway, "I must say, Alexandar, you and Lucy impressed everyone with your combined knowledge on our species last night. No one can remember the last Lycan King and Queen who managed half of what you both did. But that paternal cousin of yours was...more difficult to like."

Xandar scoffed. "Yeah, Greg is a very hateable creature. I can genuinely see us going to war solely from the way he behaves."

Octavia laughed, and appreciated that Xandar took no offense in what she just said. "I feel quite certain that that wouldn't happen while Lucy remains queen, Alexandar."

Xandar's smile faded before he asked, "Tell me something, Octavia. Did Sir Gerald Knightly fall in love with Rosalie?"

Octavia seemed uneasy before she eventually muttered, "He did," she then added, "But from whatever Pelly and her late father observed, it was never reciprocated. Her heart was only given to the very persuasive Prince Reagan, a malicious-looking creature who only turned soft in the presence of his bonded mate."

"Didn't Reagan know about Knightly's affection for Rosalie?"

"Not at first. From what I've read and heard, Reagan only appointed Knightly because he was the kingdom's best guard. More importantly, Knightly and Rosalie didn't start off on the best of terms. So, the prince felt assured that nothing could possibly happen between them. But that proved to be wrong later on, of course. Knightly was good at masking how he felt, but Reagan eventually figured it out with how he behaved around Rosalie."

"How did he behave around Rosalie?"

"It is said that Knightly was more talkative around her. He was even smiley at times, which was rumored to be very unusual for the famously-brooding knight. When Reagan found out, Knightly was promptly dismissed. A female bodyguard replaced him, but Knightly was still leading a team of four to watch over Rosalie. He just wasn't allowed to be anywhere near her anymore."

After a few quiet moments, Xandar remarked, "I wonder why I've never come across his name when I went through the research material. I mean, I know he was probably removed from lycan history because explaining his death would open a can of worms about Rosalie's existence, but why hadn't I come across his name in papers written by vampires?"

"Let's just say not a lot of vampires liked him, and since he wasn't one of us, most historians didn't see it as their duty to include him. But most of them loved Rosalie. Every historian kept Rosalie in, but only the most objective and professional ones extended the same courtesy to Knightly. Believe it or not, one of those who kept Knightly in the archives was Pelly's late distant uncle, who disliked Knightly to the core but wrote about him anyway, with a balance of good and bad. His work stopped circulating widely because after his death, the later emperor restricted circulation of that material to a certain extent. It's even rare to have heard about Knightly in our empire, let alone in your kingdom."

Xandar remembered the distant uncle, the one Rosalie successfully operated on. After another pause, Xandar muttered, "This is probably not a good thing to say, Octavia, but I feel better knowing that the insufferable disease of abusing one's power to bury the truth is not confined to our kingdom."

Octavia chuckled and patted his back like he was a brother. "That's a global pandemic that infects generations of rulers so you're not alone, Alexandar. I simply hope that...when the time comes for us to tell the truth, we won't do what our predecessors did. I hope that no matter how badly something would affect our legacies and tarnish our reputations, Pelly and I would still find the strength to own up to what we did, rather than hide it."

"Lucy and I definitely want that for ourselves too."

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 66 - Tips

0 6 minutes read

"I'd like to know more about your father, Pelly. What was the late Emperor Kosh like?" Lucianne asked after she and Pellethia sat down on a wooden bench facing a large pond with a few papilionibus (singular: papilio) – small, blue-colored animals that each had the body of a bee and the wings of spring azure butterflies.

"Father was...strict and protective, like most fathers, I suppose. We lost mom when I was three and my governess brought me up after that. Father was often busy with royal duties," her emerald eyes met Lucianne's orbs.

She continued, "He really liked you, Rosalie I mean, not as an intimate partner, but as a friend or, in his words, a trusted ally. He used to say that Rosalie was someone one could turn to for the cold, hard truth. She was the one who...made him realize that he should be spending more time with me, because I'm his daughter. She was probably the only creature who dared spelled out how irresponsible he was being as a parent to intentionally bring me into the world and then leave my upbringing in the hands of servants when he could block out time to be with me like how he blocked out time in his day to spend at his desk and with his ministers. Our family dynamic changed a lot after that."

Pellethia smiled as she watched the papilionibus fly from one water lily to the next. "I was probably the first heir to enter a meeting chamber at the age of six and a half. He never forced me to go in, and made it clear that if I ever got bored, I could always find something else to do with that time rather than

listen. I never knew what was going on in the meeting chamber in the first few months. I was just glad that my father finally...saw me, and I got to sit beside him for more than twenty minutes a day. When I started picking up on the meeting agenda, I brought colored pencils and paper to take notes, but the adults always spoke too fast for me to get everything...or I was too slow in jotting down everything.”

Lucianne chuckled at her candid admission.

“The thing about father is that he never fails to put on a brave face, a confident front. When he tucked me into bed every night, he always reminded me to fight the nightmares if I ever get any. ‘Start by putting on a brave face,’ he’d say, ‘then whoever or whatever the nightmare is would get confused. That confusion would make you braver, and that’s when you’d win.’ I still practice that to this day. But I learned that it doesn’t work on nightmares when it comes to loss of loved ones. Still, it was the most useful thing he taught me. The royal duties always came second to that. After Aunt Rosie...left, he was probably the only adult who truly believed that I could lead the empire.”

Lucianne thought about that and recalled all the times Pellethia had been brutal to her own governing members, like how she stripped Maddock’s title after a failed tracking expedition and suspended Vienna the previous night for one unhelpful remark.

Lucianne then carefully asked, “Is that why you’re...strict with your ministers and vigils?”

“Partly,” she murmured.

Her brows furrowed like she was recalling something painful as she spoke in a despaired whisper, “You have no idea what it was like to step into the meeting chamber the first time as empress, how invisible and incompetent I felt when the whole room didn’t acknowledge my presence even when I cleared my throat to get their attention. My father never needed his presence announced. For some reason, I’ve always had to prove myself worthy to sit where he sat. I tried being respectful, tolerant, approachable, but that made things worse. Many were beginning to step on me, cutting me off as I spoke. Rafael, Amber and Octavia weren’t in the governing body at that time, so there wasn’t anyone I could turn to for help. I felt so ignored, so...lost.”

Her face was still hard as she continued, “As I thought about the situation I was in, I began asking what Aunt Rosie would do if she were me. I didn’t know. Then, I started taking out anything that she gifted me during her visits, just trying to find...something to help me get through. And I found what I was looking for – a notebook.”

She took a breath and continued, “What she wrote on the back of the cover was something that I’ve read over and over again just to draw an ounce of strength to make it through the next day, or even the next hour. She wrote, and I quote, ‘when you’ve grown into a woman, you’d most likely find that everyone around you expects you to listen and obey without question. Few people expect you to have the brains to analyze and the bravery to speak up. Do the unexpected and leave your mark. Every woman has the innate ability to inspire hope, instill fear and demand respect with nothing more than a few irrefutable words and the right amount of ferocity in her eyes. Harness that power, Pelly, but wield it wisely. With love, Aunt Rosie.’”

A soft smile graced Pellethia’s features. “I never understood the depth of those words at a young age but after ascending the throne, every single word made so much sense. I tried to be a beacon of hope but the ministers looked like they were trying not to laugh at me. I tried being respectful, and they started getting comfortable with telling me what to do without even listening to what I wanted to say. So, I used fear. And things went upward after that. For me, at least. I dismissed anyone who countered my arguments with no hard evidence or plausible facts, and their immediate and unexpected dismissal jolted a lot of the other ministers. They began being more careful about what they say to me, how they behave around me.”

Her brows furrowed as she rubbed the back of her hand. “I never wanted to do this, to be...cold, brutal, unnecessarily demanding as a ruler, but when I’m not these things, the old-timers just never give me the respect and commitment that they’d give my father. I would’ve long let them go had they not been so careful that I have no valid reason to dismiss them. Being obnoxious is, unfortunately, a highly subjective trait that is not a valid reason for dismissal.”

“There aren’t many old-timers left though,” Lucianne mentioned as she recalled the ones she’d seen.

“True. There are only six left. Thank Lord. The new ones...most of them are alright. But being a little too friendly to them would make the old ones relax and slip back into their obnoxious mode. I tried. So, now, I’m like this.”

Lucianne listened to every word, and couldn't help but hear the hopelessness in Pellethia's voice and feel her doubt when she showed her vulnerable side. Then, something clicked in the queen's head. It made sense now.

What if the sole reason that Pellethia could never channel her Authority was because she didn't believe that she could, not just because the only other empress in the past didn't wield the power, but also because the condescending words and actions of the previous generation of ministers implied that Pellethia could never be on par with past emperors, let alone wield the Authority?

Lucianne herself had had condescending remarks thrown at her but she also had supportive ones showered over her, and she trained herself to pay more attention to the latter and try to flush out the former. Her self-belief wasn't bulletproof, but it was strong enough to emit the Authority.

Even so, Lucianne didn't unleash her full power until Xandar made her aware that she was bestowed that gift. In essence, one had to have a reasonable amount of self-belief and the awareness of that gift before being able to utilize the gift to its maximum potential.

Lucianne contemplated on how best to tell Pellethia what she was thinking without sounding too harsh. After giving her words some thought, she asked, "Pelly, when you're on the throne...how do you feel?"

After letting out a depressing scoff, she replied, "Terrified. Every single day. The last thing I want is for this empire to crumble on my watch."

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 67 - Tips

0 4 minutes read

Pellethia's self-doubt was not only laced heavy in her voice, but emanated strongly from her bright green eyes. Lucianne wouldn't have guessed that Pellethia had any problems with leading the empire had the empress not shown this side of herself to her.

When Lucianne thought that Pellethia was strict and ferocious to her own people, the empress was actually...scared. The fear she instilled in her governing members was a defense mechanism to shield herself from her own fear of being stepped on, being overlooked, being a puppet to more than willing puppeteers.

The fear was also probably another reason why Pellethia never found it in herself to channel the Empress's Authority. Pellethia probably couldn't draw out her power because confidence and emotional security wasn't something that she had properly developed yet. She doubted her own ability to properly lead an empire. It was without a doubt that she would doubt that she could ever wield that archaic gift.

"Pelly," Lucianne began. "In your years as empress, what is the moment you're most proud of?"

A small smile graced Pellethia's features, and she responded without hesitation, "Close the gender pay gap by the end of my fourth year on the throne. That was...phenomenal. No one thought I could do it when I brought it up, especially not the men who still saw me as a little girl, but I proved them all wrong. It felt really, really good."

"You don't happen to have a second proudest moment, do you?" Lucianne was trying to get Pellethia to recall the times she'd been a success despite all odds, warming her up to the possibility that she could do something like that again.

"I do. Choosing to be with Octavia despite the backlash. The elders claimed that homosexuality was going to ruin the sanctity of the imperial family since I'm the ruler. Some of them even started talking about overthrowing me. I asked for evidence of how my preference would inhibit the growth of my reign, and since there was none that was solid, I dismissed those who wanted to kick me out," she chuckled. "Rafael said that that was the most impactful thing that I'd ever done but removing the gender pay gap is still my first love."

"That being said, Pelly, I hope you can see that you've proven to be more capable than many rulers that once ruled this empire."

"I do try to live up to the giants who've once sat where I now sit, but sometimes, I just feel like I still...lack something."

Lucianne's hand reached for Pellethia's as she spoke with assurance, "You don't lack anything, Pelly. You are more than enough. You have everything you need to defy all odds. The will that drove you to fight for and achieve all those past successes speak for themselves. And if you feel up to it...we believe that you're able to awaken the Empress's Authority in you."

Pellethia's eyes widened in shock for a brief moment before she shook her head and said, "It's not in me, Aunt Lucy. There's no such thing. There never has been."

"That's only true if you want it to be, Pelly."

She blinked in confusion and asked, "What?"

Lucianne spoke with certainty, "Your ability to break boundaries and shatter glass ceilings show that you have the ability to wield a power that others before you have not. It's in you, Pelly. But you have to believe that you have the power and the capacity to use it. I understand that the last empress didn't have it but what if you were destined to be the first empress to wield it?"

Pellethia started giving those words some thought while Lucianne gave her the time she needed. The empress then asked, "You really think I could?"

Seeing the hope in her eyes, Lucianne proceeded to say, "I do." She refrained from telling the empress about the glowing streak on her tail, not wanting to pressure her to force the Authority out because anything that was emotionally-forced was unstable.

Pellethia then said, "If I had that power, you don't think...I could somehow...control the more...magical parts of the empire, do you, Aunt Lucy?"

Lucianne read about those. The first few emperors were so powerful that everything that was imbued with magic in their empire was at their command because it was in their territory. The Forest of Oderem came after these emperors, so no one knew whether it could be controlled.

Lucianne wasn't going that far if she were being honest, but what Pellethia suggested had definitely gotten the queen even more enthusiastic. "That's actually a wonderful thought, Pelly. I was more focused on unlocking the highest potential that's hidden deep within you, but controlling the magical aspects of your empire does sound like a great bonus."

Pellethia was touched, not only because Lucianne believed in her, but because Lucianne wanted to help her on a personal level. It wasn't about what Pellethia could do for her if and when she emitted that power. It was about helping her develop herself.

When it was around ten in the morning, the rulers bid each other goodbye for the nocturnal ones to go to bed. Xandar and Lucianne went home and spent time playing with Reida.

When the villa was a little too quiet, Xandar asked, "Babe, where are Tate and Stella?"

"The Labyrinthe Vert with Margaret. Tate told us after we landed last night."

"Oh," Xandar muttered as his hand stopped the red rubber ball in his daughter's hands from entering her mouth before he continued, "Right, that's today."

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 68 - Tips

0 4 minutes read

Despite having already met her a couple of times and spoken to her, Tate was still nervous about seeing Margaret, who was still kept in a holding unit with her followers. Tate wanted to ask for more leniency in terms of freedom and accommodation by pointing out that Greg's followers were free to go wherever they pleased and do whatever they wanted.

But the difference was that Greg had proven trustworthy when he gave himself up after exposing the Kyltons, pledging loyalty to Lucianne. The duke and his followers even kept her safe during the Blue Crescent attack. Margaret and her people had not done anything close to those things, so there wasn't a strong enough reason to satisfy granting more leniency than they were already offered.

Tate wore a light green shirt and black jeans. Stella was in a white shirt and dark shorts. They left the villa for the police station, and after Tate signed the papers, Officer Katie escorted Margaret out, reminding her and Tate that they were only allowed two hours.

Although Margaret embraced Stella, the daughter's returned gesture looked...awkward and forced. Margaret tried to mask her sorrow and acknowledged Tate, who saw through her brave face that wasn't properly put up to begin with.

They took a drive to Labyrinthe Vert, and it was very strange to Tate that Margaret and Stella didn't say a word to each other throughout the twenty-minute drive there. He thought he'd be able to get a glimpse of what this

mother-daughter pair would normally talk about during the journey. He was clearly wrong. He noticed that Stella was quietly looking out of the window when she normally would be chatting non-stop about anything.

They reached their destination, and once Tate parked in front of a gated property with concrete walls covered with lush, green moss, Margaret's rosewood eyes shone as she gasped in awe. She hopped out of the car as soon as Tate pulled to a stop and dashed forward to feel the moss with her palm. Tate thanked Goddess that there was an all-green place that was suitable for a date in lycan territory.

As he took out the car key, Stella said, "See, what did I tell ya, dad?"

Tate's head snapped to the teenager in the backseat as he asked, "What did you just call me?"

Stella gestured to her mother and replied, "Look at her. She'll cave in in no time."

As Tate unbuckled his seatbelt, he uttered, "I hope so. This is my first time bringing a woman out on a date so I really don't know what I'm doing here."

Stella scoffed in a taunting manner, which was when Tate said, "And go easy on your mother, Stella. She's been through a lot. She might be tough on you sometimes, but she loves you."

"I know that. I just..." Stella sighed in frustration and muttered, "Her love is just a little...closed-off sometimes. Does that make any sense?"

A smile graced the Alpha's features when he confessed, "I thought she was just like that with me." Then, a playful thought came to his mind when he added, "Who knows? Maybe she'll love me more than she does you, Stella."

The teenager protested without a second thought, "In your dreams! I'm the daughter!"

"Yup, and pups wait in the car with the doors safely locked while their parents—"

In an instant, Stella unbuckled her seatbelt and opened the door as she exclaimed, "No way! You promised I could take pictures."

Right after they both got out of the car, Stella asked, "Can I go in first?"

"Sure. Tell the lady it's tickets booked under Tate Brownan."

Seemingly on purpose, a cheeky grin appeared on Stella's face as she glanced at her mother and exclaimed, "Okay! Thanks, dad!"

That word brought Margaret out of her thoughts. Her palm was still glued to the moss wall but her shocked eyes went to her daughter, who was smirking in Tate's way as the Alpha heaved a sigh and muttered to the teenager, "Really?"

Stella chuckled before dashing towards the ticket booth. Tate approached Margaret in careful steps. Why did that teenager have to be so insensitive about him taking small steps in a new relationship with her mother?

When Tate stood before Margaret, she instinctively gazed into his eyes and was once again reminded of how tall and well-built he was. When she didn't say anything, he asked in a soft whisper, "You okay?"

It was only then Margaret realized that she had been staring at him longer than she expected. The thought made her blush before her eyes darted to the ground as she nodded and said, "Yeah. Yeah. Um..." she registered her hand was still on the wall, and she was the only one doing it. Some of the passerbys were throwing her weird looks like she was an uncivilized creature for feeling the moss wall, and her hand immediately left the wall alone.

Tate saw it, too. He managed to throw glares at three of them, who all recognized him as the deputy defense minister, so had to offer a polite bow as an implied apology. His eyes went back to his mate, and he reached for her hand as he said, "Don't worry about them, okay? It's just you and me. Just be yourself."

A warmth spread from the center of Margaret's chest as the sparks from Tate's touch ignited her being. She managed a small smile before she said, "Thank you."

Tate's smile broadened when he asked, "You ready to go in?"

Margaret nodded again with a brighter smile. The upward curl of her lips was enough to send Tate to cloud nine. His wolf was elated to see that their mate's eyes shone more than before, and her blushes made her look more picturesque than she already was. Beautiful.

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 69 - Tips

0 5 minutes read

When Margaret and Tate entered through the gates, they saw Stella on the far left in a squatting position as she tried to get the best angle to take a picture of the bed of orange flowers swarming with ladybugs. The teenager zoomed in on one of the insects, muttering, "Don't move. Don't move. Just one second, and..."

In the microsecond before she tapped on the button, the ladybird she set her sights on flew away, and the teenager groaned before falling on her bum and sulking while she silently cursed the uncooperative insect. That was the moment when the same ladybird landed on her knee. Stella tried not to get too excited, and very carefully positioned her phone at the best angle she could get before taking a perfect snap. Her lips curled up into a successful grin as she squealed to herself.

Tate couldn't help but smile at the sight, as did Margaret. She hadn't seen her pup being this excited about anything since her fifth or sixth birthday.

Seeing that Stella had no problems keeping herself entertained, Tate prompted Margaret, "Shall we?"

He gestured towards the right, where the entrance of a maze stood. She nodded and they entered the maze together. When Margaret noticed that they were alone, she felt more comfortable running her free hand over the plants and leaves that made up the maze. The alternating red and pink flowers beautified the leafy background, and the light rays only made the flowers stand out more than they already did.

"This place is stunning," Margaret commented.

As her hand continued running through the leaves and pausing momentarily at flowers, Tate replied, "It pales in comparison to you, Mar."

Her eyes snapped to his soft brown orbs, and she felt the familiar feelings of affection. But her smile faltered slightly when she recalled how that same

emotion left her the last time. Even so, she couldn't deny that she found it easier, much easier, to trust Tate.

The way he looked at her and spoke to her amplified his desire to know and understand her. Her wolf fell for him instantly, and her human part started falling for him on the day they spoke on his jet when they collected her pack members. A large part of her wanted this to be real and true, to be her forever.

As these thoughts went through her mind, she asked as confidently as she could, "You truly know how to get into a woman's heart, don't you, Alpha?"

Tate chuckled. "I wish that was true. I suppose the ability to charm creatures is supposed to be an Alpha's in-born talent?"

"It most definitely is."

He pulled them to a stop before taking both her hands and looking deeply into her rosewood eyes as he whispered, "I only ask for the ability to charm a certain red wolf. I wonder if that's too much to ask."

Despite her widening smile and pink cheeks, Margaret feigned ignorance and uttered, "Well, you've already charmed Stella so I'd say you got your wish. That little red wolf sticks to you like a magnet."

He closed their distance when he asked, "And what about the not-so-little red wolf?"

As Margaret tried but failed to hide her smile, she confessed in a mutter, "You're getting there."

Tate's wolf howled in happiness as he pecked a soft kiss on her knuckles before leading her deeper into the maze with a wider smile. The flowers were now in white and blue.

"What were your parents like?" Tate asked carefully.

"Mom and dad were conventional people when it came to belief systems. The no-se.x-before-marriage kind of parents. Dad was a nurse in the pack clinic, and mom was a botanist. I take on after my mother, loving greenery and all."

Tate wondered if he would be pushing it too far if he asked his next question, and decided to just give it a go, “Any brothers or sisters?”

“No...fortunately,” she said as her eyes dimmed.

“Goddess, I’m sorry I asked, Mar. I didn’t mean to hurt...”

“You didn’t,” Margaret insisted, and their gaze locked as she went on, “You don’t have to apologize for trying...Tate.”

The way she said his name was so beautiful that Tate’s heart swelled as he replayed the way his name sounded with her voice. She went on, “I miss my parents everyday, and sometimes, I just wished I was at least given a chance to say goodbye.”

After a few more steps, she continued, “I ventured back to Fleet Wood a few times after I was casted out, but every time I went near the border, I just...”

“Got stuck,” Tate finished for her. “Because the Alpha’s Authority was used to keep you out.”

Margaret’s eyes were brimming with tears as she uttered in dismay, “I never imagined the power could be that effective. I thought I would at least be able to howl from afar, and mom or dad would hear me. But I couldn’t even howl or scream when I tried to do it near my pack. I could never reach out to them to tell them where I was, to let them know that I was alive. I have no idea what Alpha Draxon did to my parents’ phone numbers because when I tried calling them from random phone booths, the line was suddenly non-existent. After twenty-three times of trying to enter Fleet Wood in two years, I just stopped trying.” There was a pause before she muttered, “I’ve never felt more alone.”

The sharp pain from reliving the memory of that helpless moment in her life cut through her heart, and Tate’s arms wrapped her in a tight embrace as he let his shirt soak up her hot tears. “You’re not alone, Mar. Not anymore. You have me, and I’m not going anywhere.”

Her wet orbs and tear-stained face looked up at the most handsome face she had ever seen. The way he held her made her feel sheltered and protected. His scent was as soothing as it was assuring, calming the anxiety and fear that she hid under lock and key for more than a decade. Tate’s very presence assured her that she could be at her most vulnerable with him and not be

taken advantage of. She may have had a mate before Tate, but Tate made her feel like she was falling in love for the very first time.

Tate carefully cupped her cheeks and wiped off the tears before pecking a soft kiss on her forehead, and he said, "You don't have to go through with these things by yourself anymore. I wasn't there for you then, but I am here for you now. I need you to know that you'll never be alone ever again, that we'll get through the rough patches together, okay?"

Margaret looked deeply into those brown orbs held nothing but a promise – a promise that she didn't have to run anymore, that she was safe, that she was...home. She managed a smile and whispered, "Thank you."

Tate chuckled briefly before he said, "Mar, you don't have to thank me for things like this. You really deserve nothing less."

Margaret's eyes watered again, this time out of joy as they came to the center of the maze where there was a fountain. The gushing water was a sound that Margaret would never get tired of hearing. When they stood before the fountain, Margaret dipped a hand into the cool water before she noticed, through their reflection, that Tate was staring at her side profile with a blissful smile.

Margaret...well, Margaret's wolf, to be precise, decided to take a leap of faith, so she closed the distance between them as she asked, "What about you, Tate? What's your family like?"

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 70 - Tips

0 4 minutes read

Tate sat by the fountain and gently pulled Margaret to sit next to him as he began, "Mom was a math teacher, and she'd throw a fit if I scored anything less than the highest mark in my class. When I was nine, the first time I was the second-highest in math, I erased my answer and wrote the correct one before going up to the teacher to ask for a review. That was the beginning of a very horrifying experience."

Margaret's eyes sparkled with interest as Tate continued, "It turned out that my math teacher and my mom were friends, so when I got home, I was given an hour's lecture, grounded on the night of a concert my friends and I bought tickets to six months prior, and, to my dismay, more math homework. There

was so much that I started seeing numbers and math questions in my dreams.”

Margaret chuckled lightly at that last part, which warmed Tate’s heart and made his animal melt. “Mom was strict as a mother and a Luna...and she was a stationery-addict. She particularly loved weird-shaped paper clips.”

“Those are cute, actually,” Margaret commented.

“Not if you have like a thousand of them at home,” Tate retorted.

Margaret weighed up that fact, and shook her head before she declared, “Sorry, Tate. I’m with your mom on this. Weird-shaped paper clips are cute even if there are a thousand of them.”

Tate chuckled, before Margaret prompted, “And your father?”

“Pop was a typical businessman, focusing on buying land and properties in strategic locations and turning them into profitable businesses.”

“Which of his businesses was your favorite growing up?” Margaret asked in curiosity.

That question took Tate by surprise. Normally, people would simply ask him to talk about the businesses that his father owned and passed down to him, or they’d venture into making small-talk, saying how lucky he was that White Blood had a consistent, lucrative income. What Margaret was asking now was on a more personal level, about what he personally thought of his father’s work.

After some thinking while he stroked the back of her hand, he said, “That would have to be the nature park that was about to be torn down had he not bought the land. The trees and plants there are exotic and gorgeous. And there’s this lake right in the middle of the park, so pop, mom and I would go there every fortnight for a canoe ride. I’d dip my hand into the water and feel the fish. There was even once when I fell into the pond.”

He laughed, but registering his mate’s eyes that widened in fear, he quickly added, “Nothing bad happened, really. Pop scooped me up before I went too deep.”

Margaret sighed with relief, and then questioned with furrowed brows, "What were you thinking?!"

Tate shrugged like it was no big deal. "The fish were just clearer underwater."

Margaret narrowed her eyes and smirked. "I'm sure they were."

Her candid reply made him laugh before he said, "I'd love to bring you there one day...if you'd like to see it."

A soft smile replaced Margaret's smirk when she uttered, "I'd like that."

Their eyes met long enough for Margaret to start blushing again, and she looked away. Very carefully, Tate's free hand reached for her face and cupped her warm cheek before turning her face for their eyes to meet once more. The Alpha got lost in those gorgeous orbs for a long moment before he whispered, "You are so beautiful."

Margaret's eyes glistened as she flustered even further, but the moment she tried to look away again, Tate muttered, "Don't hide from me, please? I want to see you."

The way his soft brown orbs penetrated into her soul gave her a sense of safety and belonging. His touch was so comforting and stimulating, like it was urging her to believe him, to believe in their bond, to believe that they could be happy together.

Tate's heart rate raced when he inched his face closer to hers. The tip of their noses touched, and their lips were barely an inch away before Margaret subconsciously held back.

"Oh c'mon, mom! That was so close to perfection!" Stella's sudden presence and outburst made Tate and Margaret flinch.

Margaret shot up from her seat in an instant, and Tate threw the teenager an annoyed look as he complained, "Really?"

"Dad, that was her fault. Why are you looking at me like that?"

"What did I say about going easy on your mother, Stella?"

Stella's head c0cked to one side as she said with a c0cky smirk, "I think it was something about her loving me more than she does you."

“Terrible memory,” Tate commented with a shake of his head.

Stella chuckled in cheekiness before she stated the obvious, “Anyway, I only came because I thought you two lovebirds needed a reminder that we only have twenty minutes left before Officer Katie calls.”

Tate’s eyes widened in shock as he checked the time on his phone. How in the world did time pass so fast? They were just here for what felt like five minutes!

He took Margaret’s hand without hesitation and spoke in a hushed voice, “We should head back.”

“Yes, we should,” Margaret managed.

During the drive back, Tate casually asked, “So, Stella, what’s your favorite part of Labyrinthe Vert?”

“Mm...definitely the fountain. I saw two people almost making out there.”

Margaret started flustering as she mouthed, “Oh Goddess.”

Tate couldn’t wipe the smile off his face as he asked, “And your second most favorite, Stella?”

He saw the teenager’s cheeky smirk from the rear view mirror when she responded, “Trying to change the subject so soon, dad?”