

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 81 - Tips

0 6 minutes read

After the break from their third round for the night, Rafael asked Lucianne, 'Ready?'

Lucianne nodded, and Rafael started at the pace they stopped in the previous round. She felt her awareness diminishing, like she was being induced to daydream, which decipios have found to be the perfect place to start at manipulating their victims. As hard as Lucianne tried to fight to stay aware and alert, she couldn't completely clear the seemingly-harmless fog invading her mind.

Instead of trying to focus on making her mind clear of the fog, she channeled her concentration to her nose and skin, smelling any creatures near her in reality and trying to feel their energies. Lucianne smelled only one vampire taking slow, cautious steps at a safe distance around her, but she was being manipulated to forget that it was Rafael.

When she began taking steps towards Rafael, he painted a fictional scene that made her halt in her steps. She was hiding behind a tree, and about five feet away from her, she saw her parents in their wolf forms, both white. They were hiding behind high bushes as their eyes glazed over, mind-linking one another.

Right when Lucianne was about to run to them, she heard disgruntled murmurs and heavy footsteps. Her parents heard it too, and they laid even lower than they already were. Lucianne instinctively matched their reaction, and dropped herself into a squatting position behind the tree as she watched two beer-bellied men and one large-sized woman with caps and rifles slung across their backs.

Hunters.

The insides of Lucianne's stomach churned, until she remembered they weren't at war with the hunters anymore. Diplomatic relationships had been established years ago. Rafael noticed her certainty, and his fog of manipulation slithered deeper into her mind to tamper with that known fact to confuse her.

She and her lycan stubbornly held onto their knowledge about the hunters, and even recalled that her parents were dead. Besides, in reality, she should

be able to smell her parents from where she was, but she wasn't detecting any of their scents at present.

When Lucianne started having these logical revelations, Rafael knew she was ready for the next level, so he made her see that the hunters noticed her parents, and was starting to aim at them with their loaded rifles. Rafael was trying to see if Lucianne would give into her emotional turmoil and urges instead of trusting what she knew to be true.

Before the hunters pulled the trigger, Lucianne turned the other way and started running in the opposite direction, not wanting to see how her parents were going to be killed. She ignored the sounds of gunshots and her parents' anguished howling, repeating to herself and her animal, 'Not true. Not true. Not true. Silver blade. Silver blade. Silver blade.' Her parents died after succumbing to the silver on blades used by hunters, not through rifle bullets.

Her reaction made Rafael smile in awe, and he put her to one last test for the session, dead certain that she was going to ace it. The enthusiastic decipio was already mentally planning on what to do in the following practice session with the queen.

Lucianne ran until she knocked into something hard. It was someone's back, someone wearing a black tuxedo. The frame was so familiar that it didn't take her long to recognise it as Xandar's back. He turned, towering over her like he always did in reality. What was different was that his eyes held no love or affection, only disgust, annoyance and hate.

"What are you doing here?" Xandar's low voice came out hostile.

"Xandar, it's me. What happened? Where are we?" Lucianne asked, looking around.

They were in the dining hall where the annual collaboration was held many months back. There wasn't another soul in sight. What were they doing there?

Xandar's cold voice drew her attention back to him, "What did you just call me?"

His question got Lucianne confused, and her animal was backing away, sensing no warmth from the Xandar they knew. Her human part was too

shocked to move. Nonetheless, she answered with uncertainty, "I called you by your name?"

He took one step closer and looked her dead in the eye when he snarled, "And who gave you the right to call me by my name? I am your king."

"You gave me that right, Xandar. You made me your queen."

Xandar scoffed darkly. "It really is that hard to accept a rejection, isn't it? I thought it would be a piece of cake for you seeing that you've already been through five."

The hurt she felt from his words was debilitating. Her emotions were spiraling out of control, and her focus left what she knew to be true and was channeled to this blatant lie. She took a step back, not sure why her mate was pushing her away.

Rafael's attempt to block her awareness was getting more successful, and Lucianne forgot that she and Xandar were already married and had a daughter together. What she was slowly told to believe was that they were bonded mates, but when they met, Xandar looked at her with nothing but disdain and rejected her in front of everyone in the annual meet-and-greet for a chosen mate, which was...

"Hello, Xandar," Kelissa Kylton's familiar voice came from behind Xandar's large frame.

The beautiful lycan wore a dark purple dress that accentuated her slim figure, and her slender fingers started massaging Xandar's left shoulder as Xandar's hand rested on her waist in the most natural manner. A smile replaced his hardened features as he pecked Kelissa on her lips.

Lucianne's heartbeat raced. It was getting harder to breathe, and harder to see because her eyes began glistening. How did she even fall in love with him despite the rejection? She told herself that she was never going to fall in love again after Sebastian Cummings. She was so sure that she didn't want a mate anymore, so why was she being upset? Why did she feel like she was being betrayed by Xandar when he had never misled her to think that he wanted her, that he had made her and the rest of the kingdom aware that only Kelissa was his rightful queen?

Lucianne looked away from the painful sight, refusing to wipe away her tears in case she would accidentally see Xandar and Kelissa kissing again. She only took two steps before Xandar's cold voice made her stop. "Where's your respect for your queen?"

She looked up, and even through her blurred vision, she could see Kelissa smirking cockily in her way, her body glued to Xandar's side.

Xandar continued to spit, "Are all wolves this delusional and uncivilized or is it just you? Kneel before your queen."

Despite her heartbreak and tears, Lucianne's face hardened when she mustered whatever little strength she had left and looked Xandar dead in the eye as she uttered a clear and defiant 'no'.

Xandar's lilac eyes turned onyx, showing his rage that Kelissa easily matched. Lucianne started walking away again, hanging her head low as she did. Then, a large hand caught her arm and spun her around. She was pulled into something hard and instantly recognized Xandar's scent, so she tried to push him away but he was refusing to let her go.

His voice came out in a desperate plea, "Baby. Baby, please. It's me."

The manipulation effects were fading off very slowly despite Rafael's effort to speed things up, and the Xandar of reality coped with the pain in his heart when his little freesia punched him in the chest and tried to make her escape as he tightened his grip around her. His animal couldn't understand what was happening, and combined its strength with its human part's to hold their mate close.

"What did you do to her?!" Xandar hissed at Rafael.

Xandar felt Lucianne's doubt through their mate-bond at first, and assumed that it was normal because the manipulations made them doubt what they were seeing every single time. But when that doubt grew into disbelief, and then painful acceptance and distance, he tried to decipher what she was distancing herself from.

That was when he realized that his worst nightmare came true – she was distancing herself from him, from their bond.

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Lucianne's devastation and the way her heart was squeezing itself made his animal howl in pain. He didn't think twice before dashing towards her, not caring that she was in the midst of practice. Xandar pulled her into his chest in an attempt to comfort her and assure his love for her, only to have her try to push him away.

When everyone saw their king sprint across the field, those taking a break started watching, and were shocked to see the way their queen was trying to break away from him. Xandar was dodging her punches aimed at his jaw and chin before caging her arms along with her body in his embrace as Lucianne sobbed and whimpered in a futile attempt to run away.

Those watching blinked countless times, some even shook their heads to make sure they weren't in a daze and squinted their eyes to verify that they weren't seeing things. Christian even asked Toby if they were both looking at the same thing. Pellethia came over, as did Octavia, and all eyes then shifted to a very guilty-looking Rafael.

The most powerful decipio watched the lycan couple helplessly as he swallowed a lump in his throat before admitting sheepishly, "Perhaps it's still too early to tamper with the mate-bond."

"You did WHAT?!" Xandar growled at a volume that echoed across Polje. He continued pressing the struggling Lucianne into his chest when he barked, "Do you have ANY idea how F*CKING hard it was to get her to open up to the idea of having me as her mate, to persuade her to accept the crown, TO MAKE HER BELIEVE THAT I LOVE HER?! Do you know how many blows she took from the mate-bond before we met?! HOW DARE Y—"

"Xandar, please stop," Lucianne's weakened voice came in a whisper.

His onyx eyes darted to her, and he was relieved to find that Lucianne was now pressing herself into his embrace and wasn't trying to escape anymore. He gently lifted up her chin, and looked into her teary orbs as he said clearly and firmly, "I love you, Lucy."

She saw the urgent anticipation in his eyes, so she whispered back, "I love you, too."

That wasn't a good answer. He heard the hesitation in her voice, and felt the doubt still lingering through their bond, so he planted a deep kiss on her forehead before demanding in a softened voice and a pleading gaze, "Tell me you know that I love you, baby."

That familiar line slowly sent the usual warmth into Lucianne's heart, and the doubt that she was struggling to flush out on her own melted away and disappeared from her system. Her small hand reached for his cheek, and Xandar leaned into her touch as he waited for her response in dismay.

She managed a small smile and finally said, "I know. I love you, too."

Xandar felt the negative emotions dissipate from her being, and relief washed over him. He pressed another kiss in her hair before muttering, "We'll talk about this later, okay?"

"Okay."

Lucianne indulged in the beautiful rhythm of his heartbeat in his warm chest, feeling the depth of his love for her for a few more moments before she decided that she was ready for round five, not realizing yet that neither her decipio partner nor her husband were ready for that.

Lucianne gently broke loose and turned to a still-remorseful Rafael, but as soon as her mouth opened, Xandar spun her around once more and said, "Perhaps that's enough practice for one night, my love."

"I'm fine now, Xandar. I can go again."

Rafael immediately added, "Your Highness, I have to agree with the king on this. We should stop for the night."

"But I'm fine," Lucianne protested with large orbs.

She started using her doe eyes on Xandar, but before they possessed the Lycan King like they always did, her husband said, "We know you are, sweetheart. But it's my turn to practice for the night, and your turn to stand guard. Here," he put the half-woven leaves into her hands and gently squeezed her forearms as he continued, "You can finish this up. I'll come check on you later, okay?"

Lucianne gaped in disbelief when she realized her husband picked up what she casually threw away. It wasn't even good work. Her sister-in-law was way better at this than she was. Xandar took advantage of Lucianne's surprise by pecking a kiss on her temple and gently ushering her towards Weaver and Phelton, who were both in the second round of guard duty too.

The ministers understood the king's silent command, and led their queen away, towards the edge of Polje. Xandar's lilac orbs followed them until they reached there, and his heart softened when Lucianne's hands began working on the leaves again. She looked absolutely adorable doing that.

His animal reminded him about Rafael, and Xandar reluctantly tore his eyes away from his wife before looking at the decipio, mustering as much diplomacy as he could when he questioned in a low voice, "Was that really necessary?"

Rafael counted himself lucky that Xandar spoke with less ferocity when he answered, "I am very, very sorry about that, Your Highness. I sincerely believed that she was going to pass that final test with nothing more than mental exhaustion. My decision to...touch that part of her mind was, for all intents and purposes, an effort to motivate the rest of the lycans and werewolves that they too can start...slithering-practice. Mental walls are very basic. I'm only worried that the proditors have more skillful decipios with them, who may well be able to tap into that area and use it to their advantage since it has proven to be the most effective way to fully distract and derail its victims. I am terribly sorry about how this turned out."

Greg couldn't stop himself from saying, "If you want US to start slithering-practice, rush US, NOT her."

Xandar threw his cousin a glare and spoke in a dead tone, "She's my mate, Greg. I can handle this. We're starting slithering-practice tonight with the empress."

Pellethia immediately said, "That's not possible. I won't do it. Your foundations on recognizing and manoeuvring around mental walls aren't even stable yet. Slithering won't only crush your minds, it'll demolish your confidence, both yours and your animals'. The last thing we need is having a lowly-motivated set of creatures to help us fight the present threat."

Greg groaned in dissatisfaction and uttered, "Fine. Let's do walls first."

Xandar took another look at Lucianne before he spoke in a commanding voice, "We should all speed up trying to improve. Push ourselves beyond the limit. We don't want to have to rely on the empire's decipios to carry our weight, nor should we let Lucy expend unnecessary energy to help us fight off the manipulation with the Queen's Authority when we can train ourselves to do it. She's protected so many creatures her whole life. We have a duty to protect her, and it's not going to be possible unless we push ourselves like how she's pushing herself."

They listened to every word, and their fatigue and reluctance diminished when they saw and felt the urgent need to step up. Their sights instinctively followed Xandar's to Lucianne, whose fingers on the leaves stopped moving when she looked left and right. She then turned with the same confused and annoyed look from earlier, but before she could say anything, everyone scattered either to take their positions around Polje, or to start practicing.

Lucianne closed her opening mouth and stole a glimpse of her brooding husband taking his position with Greg and Pellethia. She admired his muscular figure and determined eyes that were highlighted by the moonlight, and a shy smile graced her features as she returned to the leaves in her hands.

Xandar came to check up on her whenever he and Greg were taking a break, and was happy to see that she was back to normal.

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They reached home at around eleven, checked on Reida, and then got into the shower. After that, Xandar carried Lucianne, who was in her underwear and oversized shirt, to the couch of their bedroom, wanting to talk to her before bed. He placed her on his lap and held her close, listening attentively as Lucianne told him about the manipulation. She didn't smell him or Kelissa, but the image in front of her consumed her mind so much that even her lycan had completely ignored that the scents weren't present.

Xandar's grip tightened when Lucianne mentioned that she didn't even remember being married to him and having their daughter, and his animal growled at the mention of Kelissa. Xandar held Lucianne impossibly closer and pecked kisses in her hair as the tale went on.

Lucianne tried to lighten the mood by finishing the story with, "...and the whole time, I was actually talking to a tree, so I was technically being heartbroken that the tree rejected me."

He pecked another kiss on her temple before he said, "That's not funny, Lucy. That power is just so..." he sighed and rubbed a hand down his face in frustration before he chose the word, "...dangerous."

"Explains how the vampires could've won the war if our ancestors didn't surrender." She snuggled deeper into his chest and stroked the areas she punched earlier as she said, "I'm sorry about earlier."

"Goddess, baby. Please don't apologize for that. After what you were manipulated to see, it's understandable that you did what you did." After taking a greedy whiff of her scent from her hair, he cupped her cheek and lifted her face to make their eyes lock when he said, "Whatever happens, wherever we are, know that I love you, okay?"

"Okay," she uttered with a smile, and pecked a kiss on his chin before adding, "Know that I love you, too."

A soft smile replaced his hard features, and his nose gently nudged hers when he whispered, "Thank you, baby." Registering her heavy eyelids, he pecked her on the lips and uttered, "We should get some sleep now."

After Xandar carried her to bed, they fell into deep slumber in each other's arms.

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In her holding unit, Kate crawled under the sheets before deleting the messages of the day out of habit. She then extracted the SIM card and hid it in her bra. The practice tonight was horrible for her. She just received news from the person she had been conversing with, and it was worrying her.

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On another end, Hailey just got Jade to hack into Kate's phone before the signal was lost. Hailey blinked and asked in frustration, "Really? Now?"

"What a time to be taking out the SIM card," Jade replied.

“Well, she’s not supposed to have a SIM card to begin with,” Hailey noted, then added, “We should persuade the duke to report her to the queen. She’s hiding something.”

Jade, who watched Kate when Hailey couldn’t during manipulation practice said, “That would be the direct thing to do, but I’d personally ask the boss to refrain from taking any action for now. This rogue might know something that we need.”

“We snatch her phone, use it as evidence of betrayal, the queen uses the Authority on her to vomit whatever sh!t out, and boom! We get everything.”

“Really? What if there’s something in there that none of us have thought of?”

“That’s kind of the point of the Queen’s Authority, Jade.”

“No, Hay. This is the point: the Authorities only work with very specific commands. They tell us to sit, we sit. They tell us to kneel, we kneel. They tell us to go to battle and not die, we go to battle and...hope not to die. But if they say something generic, like ‘tell me the truth’, ‘tell me everything you know’,” Jade threw his hands in the air before he proceeded to say, “It’ll be basically the same as not asking.”

“Give the queen more credit, Jade. She’ll know how to phrase those questions. Even we can, like ‘tell me the truth about this text’, ‘tell me everything you know about this creature you’ve been contacting’.”

Jade’s hands raised at chest level and calmly explained, “In no way am I saying that the queen is dumb, Hay. But if we converge the truth to the text, information will be limited to the text. If we narrowed it to individual creatures, information will be limited to them. We may be looking at a network here, one that Kate herself might not even know yet.”

“Kate?”

“The rogue’s name, Hay. Who do you think? You’ve gotten better at eavesdropping but it still needs work. Anyway, the point now is that we must remember even the smartest creature will not be able to know or predict everything correctly. Take our boss, for instance, he didn’t know the Kyltons had brains to do sh*t and look what they’d been doing for almost two decades.

He's one of the smartest creatures we know, and he didn't know he was being used."

Hailey recalled the debacle and murmured, "That was a very careless mistake on his part, to work with someone without knowing who was at the top of the chain."

"And it's a mistake that he won't repeat, but the point remains: even the smartest creatures will not know everything. The queen may be smarter than most, but we can't expect her to know the exact questions to ask. We should extract whatever we can from her phone the next time the SIM card enters before making a move."

Hailey sighed in frustration and impatience before she concurred, "Fine. I'm going to bed. Tell the boss."

"Wait, me?"

Hailey smirked and copied his line from earlier, "Who do you think?"

Jade chuckled in response before he noted the obvious, "I'm not one of his favorites."

Hailey proudly declared, "I am, but I'm sleepy and I might not be as convincing as you are in putting this point forward. If you impress him enough, he might promote you to the 'favorites' position."

"I highly doubt there's room for me up there but yeah, I'll link him."

"Tonight," Hailey insisted.

Jade shut down the computer and shot her a smile when he confirmed, "Tonight."

After Hailey left, Jade linked Greg, who got on the same boat as him even before Jade finished explaining. Jade couldn't help himself from asking, "Will you be...telling the queen about this, Your Grace?" Maybe that was why he wasn't one of the duke's favorites. He tended to ask questions that were, perhaps, better off left unasked.

Greg was asking himself the same question. After a moment of flicking the pen in his hand, he said, "I have to. This is a cooperation, not a solo project amongst ourselves."

"She wouldn't...stop us, would she?"

"I hope not."

"Boss, that's not assuring at all."

"I can't speak for the queen, Jade. She's smart enough to know that what we want to do is the most strategic way forward, but she's forgiving enough to offer this rogue a chance to explain herself."

"The latter way is too soft and may be ineffective. How do we know Kate won't lie?"

"Exactly," Greg sat up and said, "I'm sure the queen will weigh in all these factors before deciding."

Jade sure hoped so. "Alright, then. You know her better than we do anyway. Night, boss."

"Thank you, Jade. Goodnight."

Greg's eyes cleared, and he continued flicking his pen in his office as he returned his attention to the penned-down information he received from the teams he deployed. Those he sent to wolf territory to ask rogue wolves about seeing vampires confirmed that they saw nothing. Good. That meant the bloodsuckers' abduction problem was within the bloodsuckers' own territory.

As for his watchers, however, it wasn't all good news. In fact, there was no news at all!

After the team he sent to examine the passageways accessible from Halo and Vent's businesses led to nothing, they took the initiative to begin watching J.J. and Bundy again. The two loud talkers were still not loud-talking like they always did before the present threat came up.

Greg still couldn't understand why J.J. and Bundy had not done anything besides visit bars with a low profile and then check-in to random inns for the

usual two-day-one-night stay. Dormant Little Red hadn't progressed or regressed either. This wasn't just getting odd, it was getting frustrating.

He linked Lepak, who began watching Red again, 'Tomorrow, whisper some nonsense into the bartender's ear and tip him ten bucks. After that, leave. See if you can feel Red staring at you.'

'As you wish, Your Grace.'

He then linked Nani, who swapped with Quinn in watching J.J. and Bundy with the same instructions.

All that was left to do was wait.

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The next morning, Lucianne packed the baby essentials before she, Xandar and Mrs Parker left for the Den. Xandar was hesitant to allow their daughter to come with them at first, but seeing that both he and Lucianne could use their Authorities on those creatures if it had to be used, he gave in.

Lucianne didn't want to spend too much time away from Reida, so she brought her daughter anywhere that didn't pose a risk of danger. She already met the royal mavericks, and they were all loyal to Greg. Since Greg was on their side, she wasn't worried about bringing Reida along.

They reached the Den, and many were fascinated by the princess, who was looking around with those curious lilac orbs in her mother's arms. Hailey came over, and was elated that they brought Reida along. She dashed back to her room, got the small teddy bear she bought after meeting Reida the first time and handed it to the princess.

The king and queen thanked Hailey for the kind gesture. The softness of the plush toy clearly pleased the baby girl, but the scent didn't. She only hugged the teddy for only a brief second before separating herself from it. After a moment, Reida rubbed the toy mercilessly against her mother's chest.

Reida's head then turned to Xandar, and her arms stretched out. Her father got the cue to carry her, but the baby dropped the toy in her mother's arm on the way, so she exclaimed 'ah!', demanding for the teddy from Lucianne before rubbing the toy against her father's chest next. When she was

satisfied with the scent of her new gift, she held it close to her chest and cooed aloud in happiness.

Hailey and Desmond then led them to the discussion room, and they noticed that Greg had added chairs around the table. When Xandar walked past Greg, Reida caught Greg's familiar scent, and turned towards her uncle before she yelled 'F*CK!' with a big smile.

"REIDA!" Lucianne exclaimed with eyes and tone that was so fierce that Reida's smile faded as she snuggled deeper into her father's chest, seeking protection.

Xandar pecked a kiss on her daughter's forehead as he whispered, "Well done, cupcake."

Greg took no offense, and simply chuckled lightly before he said, "Good morning to you too, princess."

Lucianne was in the midst of apologizing before Greg stopped her from finishing, "I doubt she knows what that word means, My Queen. It really isn't an issue. It's probably her way of saying 'hi'."

Xandar then muttered to Reida, "Daddy will explain what it means, cupcake. But you'll have to promise that you'll keep saying it when you see Uncle Greg, okay?"

Lucianne warned, "Don't. You. Dare. Xandar. She's too young. She shouldn't be saying that to ANYONE yet."

Of course Xandar didn't mean it. He just wanted to elicit a response from his mate. The proud father doubted Reida possessed the vocabulary required to understand that word anyway. After stroking his fuming wife's hand to calm her down, they started the discussion.

Greg brought them up to speed about Dr Tanish and Madame Psych. The good news was that this was a false alarm. The scientists behaved normally, speaking only to each other while closing off their field of vision, hearing and opinion to everyone else. They were, in Greg's words, 'still dabbling in random nonsense without any prospect of a breakthrough'.

When they moved on to J.J., Bundy and Dormant Little Red, Lucianne's brows pulled together when she questioned, "Are these three from the same...clan, Greg?"

"Never was, and I doubt they ever will be. They aren't in any clan, clique or group per se. No one wants them. Apart from being able to keep themselves alive, they're practically useless."

Lucianne crossed her arms and leaned back into her seat. "Useless," she muttered in contemplation. "How are the two females affording the stay at the inns?"

"They're pickpockets, My Queen."

"Pickpocket who? The other rogues?"

"Sometimes. There are also a number of dim creatures in our territory who wouldn't know what these two are up to until it's too late, even if it has happened several times before. Other times, they use scent sprays and disguises to steal from those in crowded places of the kingdom. Malls, markets, airports, and the like."

"So...you're saying they're useless despite being able to pickpocket because their skill isn't up to your standards?" Lucianne asked.

"I suppose you could say that, My Queen. Beyond knocking someone's wallet or cash-stack out of a bag, they can't do anything without alerting their prey. They can't even steal from someone's wrists or pockets, which are where most valuables are found."

Lucianne got to thinking again. "Have they been staying in the same inns this whole time?"

Greg looked at Nani, who nodded in confirmation.

Same inns. Same routine. Same frequented locations. Nothing changed except the fact that they both quieted down. The usually-drunk Red sobered up. Why would creatures need silence AND be sober?

When Lucianne figured it out, she looked straight at Greg and said, "You think they're watching your people."

Greg admitted in a low voice, "It's a preliminary suspicion for now, My Queen, but yes."

Xandar asked, "Why would someone want to watch your followers?"

Greg replied, "Like you, not everyone likes me, cousin."

"I thought you had everyone under your power."

"I had everyone under the impression that no one can or should mess with me and my followers. Not every rogue lycan is my follower."

Xandar then uttered in revelation, "There's someone who wants to challenge your position. That's the present threat."

Greg muttered in dissatisfaction, "Suspected threat."

The king turned to his queen and uttered, "The other day at Blue Crescent...you were the only one who wasn't physically attacked by the proditors. They want to control you with the concoction, and use you to control the rest of us. Whoever is behind this is playing the big game, to control not just those loyal to the kingdom but also those who aren't. The proditors and whoever they're working with is looking to overthrow me AND the king of rogues here. They think they can do it but they need time, and those watching his followers right now are just buying time by...being red herrings."

Greg and everyone else in the room couldn't mask their surprise at Xandar acknowledging that the duke was a king of something. Xandar didn't see an issue with it because he had seen the way his followers interact with Greg.

Despite Greg's poker face and dead tone, his followers always exuded the willingness to serve, the same type of energy that Xandar himself got from his own ministers, police and warriors. Sure, Xandar had the King's Authority to compel any rogue as he pleased but Greg had power over them without any Authority.

Lucianne was the first to blink and said, "That does seem to be the case, darling. Uh..." her sights returned to Greg when she asked, "Will there be anything you need, Greg? Something within our system or..."

“What we need from you, My Queen, is permission for another matter.” Greg then explained the situation with Kate, and Lucianne held her breath until he finished his story.

She mind-linked Xandar to discuss the matter, and when her eyes cleared, she swallowed a lump in her throat and said, “Do whatever is necessary to keep our people safe. Every single one of them, including the mavericks.”

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In the Forest of Oderem, the vigils were NOT having fun.

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0 8 minutes read

Duica and VIG002, Bernadette, went in as the last pair on their third day of forest-testing. They were all relieved that no unexplained misfortune was reported from the palace or from their families and friends, and they were immensely grateful that the forest exuded only fresh and pleasant scents when they entered each time. Despite the positive signs, they were still anxious and daunted because of their knowledge about past curses.

Duica and Bernadette went half a mile in, and Bernadette took out her notepad to record the scents of buns and waffles she was smelling before Duica suggested, “Perhaps we can go a little further today. Maybe see what’s another half a mile away.”

They were both veloxes, running wasn’t a problem. Bernadette gave her comrade’s words some thought before she agreed, “Her Imperial Majesty didn’t draw any limits on how deep we can go.”

They sped another half a mile, and reached a river with the clearest water they’d ever seen. They saw the rocks at the riverbed, and the odd-looking fish swimming in the water, and couldn’t help but find that this looked a lot like the illustrations in books that wrote about this place.

Duica muttered, “The River of Heres. It exists.”

“I wonder if the source exists,” Bernadette responded as she recalled whatever knowledge generations of vampires retained since the birth of this forest.

Their eyes traced upstream, and without any discussion or contemplation, they marched up north, admiring the turquoise seaweed and pink-colored rocks in the clear water. As they continued on their path, Duica realized that the smell of buns and waffles was getting stronger. It was as if the forest was leading them somewhere. He was wary, as was Bernadette. They hoped that if they were being lured into a trap, they'd have enough time to mind-link the other vigils before they passed out or were killed.

It took them only ten minutes of brisk walking to find themselves before a coursing waterfall. Bernadette murmured, "The Misty Waterfall of Heres. It's real."

Duica uttered, "It's amazing. With the water and food source, there's absolutely no reason to leave this place. I wonder if those who hide here eat the fish."

As soon as he said that, a random yellow flower nearby opened and sprayed a scent of animal dung at Duica, taking offense in what he just said. As Duica choked on the horrible odor, he said aloud, "I suppose not. Sorry about that."

Upon conveying a sincere apology, the foul odor disappeared, replaced with fresh buns and waffles once again. The observation fascinated the two vigils. As they neared the waterfall, they heard something – rustling leaves.

Their feet stopped as their investigative eyes roamed the place, trying to pinpoint the source. They spotted a large leaf on the ground that was swaying to a stop when their eyes were fixed there, and Bernadette was about to skip across the river before Duica held her back by her arm.

"There are only two of us. We shouldn't try to follow it yet. It isn't wise. We should head back and get the others."

"What if they escaped by then?" Bernadette hissed.

"I doubt they would, Bernie. They have nowhere else to hide. If they run from the forest and enter where we are, the custodes will have a field day arresting them."

Bernadette's hard gaze stayed on the now-still leaf as she hissed, "We should link the others and ask them to meet us here!"

“Sure, while we stand here and wait for any creature in there to surround and attack us when we’re clearly outnumbered.”

She gave Duica’s sarcasm some thought before she mumbled, “Fine. Let’s head back and fetch the others.”

###

Gerella came out of her and her family’s hideout for a daily stroll and a breather before she heard two unfamiliar voices. As soon as she registered their unfamiliar faces and clean and tidy appearance, she concluded that they were non-proditors. Her defensive instincts took over, and invisibility ability hid her in plain sight as she stayed rooted to her spot, being careful to not move an inch or make a sound.

But an unhelpful insect found it appropriate to land on her leg, and it bit her through her pants, causing her leg to jerk reflexively and hit the large leaf next to her. Internally, she cursed as she resisted the urge to manually stop the swaying leaf. Gerella prayed that neither of the vigils were discretus, and was relieved when they couldn’t see her even though they were looking straight at her.

When she saw the woman ready to cross the river, Gerella’s heart stopped and was about to turn and run, which would have effectively blown her cover. But when the man stopped his companion, she thanked Goddess and Lord that she wasn’t going to get caught today.

When the two were far enough, Gerella dashed back, hoping that she wasn’t seen or followed. She took the longer route just to make sure she wasn’t leading the enemy right to their community hideout. Relieved washed over her when she concluded that they were still safe.

It was as if she was relieved too soon. The forest’s protection mark on her nape started to sting, and when her fingers instinctively flew to that area, there was a slight electrocution that she had never felt before. What was going on?

‘Gerella! Where are you?!’ Their leader, Saxum, was linking her with a worried and angered tone through the link.

'I'm only half a mile away from our place. I'm getting there as fast as I can. Saxum...the protection mark...it...'

'I know. Get back here quickly. We're leaving. I'm calling for an emergency meeting after we've reached the safe house. We're hastening the Callows.'

'But the sting and the burn...what does it mean?'

'The forest might be...switching allegiance. It's contemplating for now, so we still have the mark and its protection. But we don't have much time left. Just get back here and pack up whatever's important so we can leave!'

Gerella figured this wasn't the best time to tell him that two non-proditors almost saw her. He already sounded worried as it was. And why wouldn't he be? Who knew what the authorities would do if they found out that hybrids like them existed, and had been living for centuries right under their noses.

According to Saxum, Emperor Kosh slaughtered many of them because they didn't 'obey the laws of nature'. This horrific tale was passed on to generation after generation of hybrids, justifying the need to stay hidden. To be killed for what she was wasn't a fate that Gerella wanted for herself or for her friends and family.

The Forest of Oderem was switching sides? Could that really happen? She never took the forest for being fickle-minded. If anything, she and everyone else had taken the forest's protection for granted. The authorities and imperial family were so afraid of getting cursed that no one who wasn't protected would enter or even come near.

Gerella hyperventilated when she finally reached a place she called home. After kicking away the dried leaves that covered the metal opening, she knocked on the metal surface three times, once and then five times before opening the cover and climbing down the wooden ladder, closing the cover behind her. As usual, the forest produced a gust of wind that blew the dried leaves back to cover the metal cover.

Gerella found that everyone was already running about and didn't even offer her a glance as they stuffed valuables into suitcases. Some who packed fast were already walking through the newly-dug tunnel leading to lycan territory.

Saxum took out a large box that arrived not long ago, which had the word 'FRAGILE' written in red. The leader then instructed the veloxes and the

hybrids who possessed the abilities of a velox to place the items all around their hideout. Without question, each of them took as many as their hands could carry and sped around the place, putting the item in every place that held the fragile object before coming back to take more and dashing to the other rooms and corridors to do the same.

“What are you waiting for?! Hurry up and pack!” Saxum exclaimed in irritation when Gerella didn’t move from her spot.

“Right,” she responded simply and opened up her suitcase to pack a few clothes, the only notebook she owned and her mother’s scarf.

On her way to the tunnel, a three-year-old toddler came forward and took her hand. Gerella hid her anxiety and smiled at little Isla as she said, “Your mama and dada ready, Isla?”

The clueless little girl smiled and nodded, and Gerella saw her parents weren’t far from where they were, both equally panicky. Isla asked Gerella, “Ella, where’re we going?”

In a hushed tone, Gerella assured, “We’re going on a trip together, some place nice and cozy.”

“Will that place have big, buu paa-pee-lionibus?” Little Isla had been fascinated by papilionibus ever since she noticed the protection mark on everyone’s necks that bore the symbol, even her own. Gerella once told Isla that papilionibus were blue, showing the girl a picture of the insect from a book that had been handed down for generations.

Gerella held on to her excited smile and said, “Who knows? We might just see them.”

Isla giggled and excitedly marched forward with Gerella’s hand in hers. Gerella turned and locked eyes with Saxum, whose brows pulled together before he and three other hybrids pushed a boulder to cover the opening of the tunnel.

A short distance forward, Saxum pulled a rope to let down a grill which had sharp points that dug into the soil below. About a mile forward, Saxum linked Gerella, “As soon as the kids are at the safe house, link me. I don’t want them to hear the explosion.”

“Will do, Saxum.”

It took them twenty minutes to reach the ‘safe house’. That was the quickest they could manage even with those with super speed carrying those who didn’t have that gift. Their safe house was just their accomplice’s hotel that was thought to be insolvent and out of business long ago. Klementine, the lycan owner, ushered them upstairs. Gerella counted the twenty-five children twice before she clapped her hands in excitement to get their attention.

She then spoke animatedly, “Now, let’s play a game.”

The children got excited and formed a circle on the floor, and Gerella sat among them. Her blue eyes sparkled when she explained, “Here’s what we’ll do. When I say ‘go’, we cover our ears and scream. The one who screams the loudest and longest wins. Ready?”

Some of the over-enthusiastic children even started screaming before the game started, and Gerella simply chuckled before asking them to save their vocal chords. Their parents behind them were trying to look as normal as possible, and they too covered their ears.

“Ready? One, two, three, GO!”

When Gerella saw every child covering their ears and screaming their lungs out, she linked Saxum, “NOW!”

Saxum stood behind another two boulders that were placed ten miles away from the first one, and when he got Gerella’s link, his ready thumb pressed the red button on the control to detonate the explosives that completely covered the ten-mile gap with rocks of all sizes.

That should keep them safe, he thought, as he made his way to join the others, who felt the vibration but chose to say nothing to the kids while Gerella lied to the children by saying that the strength of their voices shook the earth.

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 86 - Tips

0 8 minutes read

Saxum didn’t even sit when he reached Klementine’s place. Every administrative creature of their community was at the worn-out wooden table. Gerella went to Saxum’s side, whispered about the non-proditors’ presence into his ear and waited.

Saxum's blue eyes darkened, and he gave a firm nod of acknowledgement before Gerella left his side to take her seat at the only empty chair left next to him. The hard-faced leader with the ability of a fortis began, "Callows. Get to it. How much longer?"

The Callows were lycan triplets – Matthew, Nessa and Ourelia. Gifted and ambitious didn't even begin to describe these three scientists, who shared a home lab since they were kids. Science fairs and competitions were for losers who wanted to waste time and potential on small-scaled successes that would be forgotten once the heat of the competition was over. The triplets had never aimed for anything less than world domination.

Matthew Callow, with bushy white beard that covered his jawline and chin, peered at Saxum in annoyance, and repeated the same thing he'd been saying since the failed attack in Blue Crescent, "I can't give a definite timeline, Saxum. Tests and experiments can run for years before we see the slightest hint of success, especially with one as huge as this."

His sister, Nessa, with messy short, brown hair that had prominent white strands here and there, affirmed, "If it were that easy and quick to come up with the formula for the chemical, someone would've done it by now. Sustainable success takes time. For the hundredth time, Saxum, this WILL take time!"

Saxum's fist fell on the table, and all the creatures but the triplets jerked at the impact as their leader snarled, "Time...is something we don't have. The Blue Crescent attack triggered them, and now they're out for blood. Seeking refuge in the Forest of Oderem isn't a safe option for us anymore."

Matthew countered, "I thought you claimed that no authorities ever dared enter the Forest of Oderem."

Saxum glanced at Gerella before he shared what he had just learned, "Not until today."

Now the triplets were worried. Saxum continued, "You have to speed things up. I don't care how you do it. Just do it. Stop trying to be so careful with the vampires."

Ourelia, the youngest triplet, scoffed darkly as she taunted, "You really know nothing, do you, Saxum? We're not being careful with them because we don't want to hurt them. They're just raw material to us at the end of the day," she

leaned forward and continued speaking slowly like she was explaining something to a child, “Extracting segments of their brain is a very delicate process. We’re being careful about taking out what we want. It’s not. About. Their lives.”

Saxum persisted to argue, “Then speed up being careful. When I agreed to work with you, you and your siblings promised efficiency.”

Ourelia smirked arrogantly and countered, “When YOU asked for this sort of help from the three geniuses of the rogue population, YOU promised bulletproof protection and anonymity by the forest which we’re supposed to hide in should something go sideways,” she chuckled condescendingly before saying in a low voice, “Looks like we both f*cked up.”

Saxum’s fist slammed the table once more, demanding the respect that Ourelia was more than happy NOT to give. Nessa placed her hand over her sister’s wrist to stop the words at the tip of Ourelia’s tongue from spilling out as Ourelia flicked her long, brown hair to the back and crossed her arms while she sealed her lips shut.

Matthew took over the conversation. “Slamming the table repeatedly is not going to get us anywhere, Saxum. I told you to refuse that idiot of a wolf’s request to attack the wolf pack. It was bad enough that he wanted to outright show that our species are now working together. It’s even worse that, of all the packs in existence, he chose the birth pack of the queen!”

Another vampire, Regina, spoke in Saxum’s defense, “It was Draxon’s idea. We weren’t familiar with wolf and lycan territories. We trusted his judgment because he was a wolf.”

Ourelia simpered and muttered, “One of the most stupid ones I’ve ever seen.”

Saxum brought everyone back to the problem at hand. “Draxon was an idiot, and he’s dead. We’d be joining him too if you three don’t speed things up. You have the formula to come with the shell. Why is it so difficult to replicate and modify it in some way to shield us against the queen’s power? If you can’t create something to manipulate her to control another like how you three initially promised, at least create a shield!”

Nessa spat, "Do you think we're not trying to do just that? The problem with that former wolf's power is that no one knows how it's different from the King's Authority, neither does anyone know how much more powerful it is."

"How is that possible?" Chong, a wolf and Regina's mate, questioned in disbelief. "She's a wolf. She's not supposed to be more powerful than a lycan, and we're talking about the Lycan King!"

Nessa uttered, "That's a mystery that we can only hope to understand BEFORE they find us. The duke is already spreading his forces at every corner that shows the faintest trace of abnormality."

"Are the distractions still working?" Saxum asked.

Nessa replied, "For now, it is. His people are still watching our puppets. That ought to keep the royal rogues busy for a little while longer."

Ourelia mumbled in dissatisfaction, "But not much longer. They'd figure things out soon enough."

Regina smirked and declared, "If they were that smart, they'd know you three were still alive, wouldn't they?"

The triplets glared at the woman who, to them, was nothing short of an imbecile when Matthew said, "It wasn't easy to make the duke AND his followers believe that our end came with an experiment that went wrong. He already had people tracking us before they lost our trail. Knowing the duke, he'd still suspect that we're alive since our bodies were never found."

Ourelia hissed at her brother, "I TOLD you we should've left fake corpses behind!"

"And then what?!" Matthew yelled back. "When the duke gets the lab reports, he'd know they're fake anyway! And then he'd be certain that we ARE alive! At least now, it's just a suspicion."

"Shut up. Both of you," Nessa said sternly.

Chong simpered. "At least one of you has some sense."

Nessa threw him a sharp glare when she spoke in her siblings' defense, "Their reactions are justified. We argued a lot on the best possible solution to

get off the duke's radar. In the rogue world, Greg Claw either likes you enough to recruit you, respects you enough to leave you alone, finds you displeasing enough to keep you out of his turf, or finds you dangerous enough to kill you. You don't need to be as intelligent as we are to know where the three of us fit in."

Saxum let out a short, dark chuckle when he said, "You three aren't the geniuses you proclaim to be, are you? From what I heard, the duke only takes the best of the best."

Matthew refuted, "He takes whoever works FOR him, and we don't work for anyone. Our aptitude far surpasses everyone in the rogue community, even Greg Claw. He saw us as threats when we questioned his position, and was plotting to get rid of us."

Regina commented, "For creatures who claim to possess superior intelligence, it's odd that you've made close to zero progress."

Matthew simmered in anger as he said, "Your memory must have gotten lost through those jumbled up curls on your head. Let me see if I can help you remember – in Blue Crescent, we couldn't control the queen but what we gave the decipios controlled the king. Acario and Maurine said the last glimpse they caught on the battleground was that the king attacked the queen, isn't that true?"

Saxum muttered, "It is."

Matthew seemed calmer when he said, "Well, then. That's progress. Instead of wasting time that we don't have trying to control the queen or shield ourselves from a power that could take years to understand and challenge, I say we control the king."

Gerella spoke for the first time, "Weren't there rumors saying that his Authority is inferior to hers?"

Ourelia smirked and said, "The events at Blue Crescent have confirmed that rumor, so it's a fact. It doesn't matter. Acario and Maurine said that the queen didn't even try to attack, which means that she wouldn't do anything to hurt him while he is under our control, and that would be her demise."

Nessa then confessed, "But the one we gave the proditors the last time wasn't...strong enough, I'd say. Those who manipulated the king reported

back saying that it was a close call, that their combined power might not have been enough to overpower the Lycan King, even with the help of our chemical. The king was close to shaking off its effects.”

Ourelia muttered, “We’ll just increase the concentration.”

Matthew added, “Which would then require us to make further adjustments so that it doesn’t harm the proditors’ systems in any way. For the rest of us, it’s wise to ingest the shell. It won’t shield us from the queen but if the king can’t be kept under our command after he manages to kill the queen, we’ll need the shell to make our escape.”

“Agreed,” Nessa uttered.

Saxum stared at the table as he asked a pressing question, “Are the vampires in your storage enough to manufacture a higher concentration of the chemical you gave the proditor-decipios last time?”

Matthew did a mental count and said, “It’s enough for half of them, maybe a few more, but not enough for the rest.”

Chong immediately asked Saxum, “Should we send them to get more from the villages, Saxum?”

Saxum didn’t hesitate when he gave a slight shake of his head and answered, “No. It’s no longer safe. We used to be able to rely on the forest to keep authorities out. Now, they can go in and leave without getting cursed. We don’t have a proper escape route anymore.”

Regina’s brows pulled together as she tried to console her leader and friend, “Saxum, we don’t know that yet. It’s too early to tell. Perhaps the forest’s enchantment would work within the next few days.”

Saxum’s hard look continued to be fixed on the table as he declared, “Merely hoping that someone in the imperial family would be cursed is not a good option. Hope is not a strategy, Regina. We are not waiting around to see if they manage to find us. The Callows will manufacture the...king-controlling chemical with whatever they have, and we’ll have to move out of here by tonight.”

His decision sent a shockwave among the creatures who had just moved hours ago. Gerella asked in a way that was asking Saxum to reconsider, “Tonight?”

His worried gaze met hers when he said, “We’re only safe for now. When they dig their way through that tunnel, we will be found. It’s better to leave now when we still have time on our hands.”

Everyone internalized that fact before Saxum told Gerella, “Send an urgent message to Neptune. Tell him we need that spare hideout tonight.”

Gerella nodded without question and everyone dispersed. Gerella got a sheet of paper from Klementine and wrote out a message in proditor code before handing the message to Klementine’s assistant, Feva, who sped to Neptune’s residence.

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 87 - Tips

0 7 minutes read

Eighteen vigils entered the Forest of Oderem with Duica and Bernadette, and the forest graced their nostrils with the same scent of freshly-baked pastries once more. When they reached the River of Heres, they felt the ground trembling for a brief moment, which made them pause in their steps as the fish in the water swam away out of fear.

When nothing happened for the next few moments, the vigils followed the trail up to the waterfall. Two vigils stayed at that spot while the remaining eighteen crossed the river and started sniffing.

Bernadette caught a faint mixed-scent of vampires and lycans, and they headed in that particular direction. After dashing for only a mile, the trail just stopped.

“Scent sprays. Damn these proditors,” VIG 009, Dominic cursed.

Duica murmured, “This is the Forest of Oderem. This whole place is practically a scent-producing factory. Do synthetic scent sprays even work here? Wouldn’t the forest just wipe them out?”

His eyes scanned the place, unconvinced that that was the end of the trail. He and a few others started walking around, and when they stepped on the metal cover, they paused in surprise for a brief second before starting to kick away

the dry leaves. The cover contained a symbol of what appeared to be the front view of a papilio, the very type of insect that was only found in the palace pond and nowhere else in the empire.

Dominic hesitantly asked, "Do we still think their Imperial Majesties have nothing to do with this?"

Duica squatted and studied the cover. The metal had a thick layer of rust. Certain parts of the cover were beginning to chip off. Duica then questioned, "If they had something to do with it, why send us here to find the purported closet hiding their skeletons?"

Dominic looked around and suggested in a whisper like he was about to say something forbidden, "To lure us in there and k!ll us, perhaps?"

Bernadette's brows furrowed in disbelief when she retorted, "Why would the empress want to k!ll us? We've only ever been loyal to her and her consort."

Dominic sighed before asking, "Alright, then. Who's going in there?"

"I am," Bernadette was the first to volunteer. Another nine vigils did too, including Duica.

Apart from two vigils who bent over the cover, getting ready to pull it open, the other vigils got ready for a possible attack at the opening. Upon Duica's firm nod, the two pulled open the cover, and to everyone's relief, nothing came out.

Now, on to the next step: entering.

Duica hopped in first, followed by Bernadette and the rest. All of them immediately noticed the rope attached to the opening that appeared freshly cut. There wasn't a soul in sight. Their vision adjusted to the darkness and one of them switched on the lamps on the floor, walls and tables. There was a lot of furniture around, and none of it had any dust.

Bernadette concluded, "They either left before we got here, or they'd be coming back."

Duica said, "I doubt they'd be coming back, Bernie. There are no valuables here. These are just things that no one takes with them when they run."

“But if they ran...”

Duica finished for her, “Someone saw us. They knew we were coming. Search the place, everyone.”

Eighteen vigils entered the Forest of Oderem with Duica and Bernadette, and the forest graced their nostrils with the same scent of freshly-baked pastries once more. When they reached the River of Heres, they felt the ground trembling for a brief moment, which made them pause in their steps as the fish in the water swam away out of fear.

They scoured the hallways lit by more wall lamps, and went from room to room. The mixed vampire-lycan scents were everywhere. Like the vigils were taught to do with the case from *Falling Vines* and *Saber Vagary*, they sniffed any clothes and belongings left behind before recording the scents.

Duica noticed a fresh trail in the soil, and traced it to the boulder. He got three fortis to move it to the side, and they were astonished to find a tunnel that led to a grill, which was being pushed back by a wall of rocks.

Everyone awaited instructions, and Duica calmly said, “If the Forest of Oderem has led us here, unharmed, we can assume that it’s safe for their Majesties and Highnesses to enter. We should return to the castle and report our findings.”

After the quick sniff and search, the lights were turned off and the vigils came out from the metal opening. Duica was halfway through suggesting they scoured the rest of the forest before the smell of rotten eggs was sprayed by a staghorn fern in his face.

‘How is a fern even capable of producing any scent?’ Duica wondered.

Dominic bit his bottom lip to stop himself from laughing at his leader before he said, “I don’t think the forest wants us to do that.”

Duica coughed and distanced himself from the harmless-looking plant before he uttered louder than usual, “Fine fine. We’ll just return and report.” The fresh scent of pastries replaced the foul odor once more.

###

Pellethia and Octavia granted them an immediate audience, and they didn't even need to consult one another before Pellethia called Lucianne right after.

When Lucianne received the call, she and Xandar rounded up the defense ministers, alliance members, Greg and his top four, Margaret and two of her followers (Azalea and Zane), Chief Dalloway and fifteen lycan warriors before making their way to the Forest of Oderem.

The abandoned castle next to the forest looked oddly familiar to Lucianne and Pellethia, though neither of them knew why. They hadn't even been here before. Perhaps it was just a memory from seeing a picture somewhere?

Octavia was visibly worried about letting her wife enter, fearful of any curses that their species had heard so much about, but also understood the need to do this now. The familiar scent of pastries graced everyone's nostrils, and Pellethia couldn't help but smile and chuckled lightly with glistening eyes.

Octavia asked in confusion, "What is it, my dear?"

Her emerald eyes were soft when she said, "That scent reminds me of mom. The whole castle would smell like a bakery when she baked and sent pastries to everyone, even the servants. When I smelled that as a child, I'd drop whatever I was doing and go looking for her just by following the scent. It was like a mother-daughter game of smell-and-peek."

The vigils didn't connect the pastry scents to the late empress, and no one could blame them. The woman passed away more than a millennium ago.

Xandar smiled and said, "The forest is welcoming you, drawing you towards it."

Greg rebutted, "Or luring you into a trap."

Xandar argued, "If that were true, Greg, those who escaped that underground hideout wouldn't have had to escape."

"How do we know the hideout isn't just left empty to mislead us to think that they escaped? What if there was another hideout that the forest didn't want us to find, hence sprayed foul smells at vigil number one over there when he wanted to look?"

In the midst of their argument, Lucianne was looking straight at the forest and feeling its energy. It felt safe, warm and...welcoming. She had a habit of feeling a creature's energy, but never a forest. This was very odd. Without a word, she started taking steps towards it.

That was when Greg came right in front of her and stopped her in her tracks. "My Queen, the king and I are still arguing about this."

Lucianne's curious eyes were replaced with annoyance when she said, "Then you two can stay here and finish the argument. I'm going in."

The duke stopped her again and heaved a heavy sigh at her stubbornness before he suggested, "Let some of us go in first to make sure that it's saf—"

"No," Lucianne spoke in firm defiance, then added, "We all had a deal the other night, Greg. The vigils test the forest for three days, and if nothing happens, I'm allowed to go in. Nothing happened. I'm going in."

Greg faced Xandar and asked in despair and disbelief, "Is there a reason that you're not doing anything to stop her?"

Xandar gestured towards the forest as he said, "Greg, look at it. Feel it. Do you feel any danger or negative energy?"

No, he didn't. In fact, his lycan was curious about the forest, too. The duke couldn't believe his own animal was onboard with this. This beast was trained to be more logical and rational than most, and it always prioritized Lucianne's safety. How could it not be the least bit suspicious now?

Greg hissed at his cousin in hopes of making his own animal listen as well when he questioned, "You're basing whether it's safe on a feeling?!"

Xandar responded instantly, "Any victim in history who was lured in and suffered an unfaithful death or injury felt a degree of danger and uncertainty when they entered, despite the pleasant scents. I don't know about you and your animal, but my lycan isn't picking up any danger from that place."

"Despite the tremor the vigils reported feeling?!" Greg exclaimed at both his cousin and his animal.

Greg's lycan was nodding its head in certainty when Xandar replied in irritation, "Yes! They all got out unharmed, didn't they? If the forest really

wanted to go for the kill, it would've caused a second tremor to drop rocks on the vigils when they were in the hideout, don't you think?"

Without waiting for Greg's response, Lucianne groaned and walked around him to head towards the forest, and the cousins dropped their argument to follow her. Pellethia was as sure about the forest as Lucianne was, and walked by her side.

The moment they entered, Lucianne felt a warmth wrap around her body. She looked at her hands and legs but found nothing beyond the ordinary. It was then everyone started gasping. She looked around and her eyes widened in shock at two of the five copper streaks in Pellethia's hair glowing – one in blue, and one in green.

The Rogues Who Went Rogue Chapter 88 - Tips

0 5 minutes read

Greg muttered sarcastically at the sight of Pellethia's glowing streaks of hair, "Great. Now that we have a live glow stick, we can stay here until nightfall and nothing will happen."

A yellow flower near Greg bloomed instantaneously and sprayed scents of animal dung at him. The duke choked on the pungent smell and moved far away to another plant, only to be sprayed by the same foul odor by another yellow flower.

Seeing how Greg was suffering, Christian turned to Xandar and declared with a satisfied grin, "I like it here, cuz."

Xandar himself had to look away from Greg to make sure he didn't chuckle out loud. At that point, Christian felt something at the sole of his left foot before two green tendrils wrapped his shoe from each side and entwined with one another. Then, two red roses bloomed to exude that all too familiar rosy scent.

Amber, Rafael and Octavia were pressing back cheeky smiles when the duke turned to his cousin and asked in bewilderment, "Am I supposed to know what this means, cuz?"

Xandar's eyes amplified playfulness when he patted his cousin on the shoulder and said, "Looks like the forest likes you too, Christian. It's flirting with you."

Rafael burst into laughter, as did many others when the duke's eyes widened in shock. "Please tell me you're joking, cuz."

Christian's right shoe was wrapped by tendrils the same way before another two red roses bloomed there. Lucianne started chuckling with Xandar at the sight as the king said, "Well, now that I think of it, flirting is too shallow. I'd say the forest has already fallen in love with you."

"Uh..." Christian would have thought Xandar was pulling his leg but the looks on everyone else's faces, especially the vampires, confirmed that whatever his best friend just told him may be true.

He had no idea how to reject a forest's advances, a forest that had the ability to curse anyone in the empire if it was angered. His lycan was of no help when it told him to just pull his leg out and break the tendrils because only Annie could be tender with him like that. His human part knew that doing what he and his animal truly wanted would be reckless. He didn't want random creatures to be cursed because of him, and he surely didn't want the forest to go after Annie.

Christian bent down and looked at the fully-bloomed roses, swallowed a lump in his throat, awkwardly patted the two flowers on his right foot and muttered, "I'm flattered, really, but uh...I have someone," the petals started wilting and the red started turning brown. Christian didn't want to upset the forest so he added, "You're definitely something special, and I'm not saying that we aren't good enough for one another, but it's just...we might not be...the best fit in the long run. I hope you understand."

Lucianne had to bury her face in Xandar's chest to muffle out the laughter, and Xandar did the same by hiding his mouth in her hair. The burst of humor in their bond was out of control, and the worst part was that neither of them were capable of stopping the other.

Toby already pulled up his turtleneck shirt to cover his mouth, and the other wolves and lycans were using various ways to hold back the humor. They envied their animals who were all chuckling and laughing uncontrollably in their minds when their human parts had to put on a straight face. Some of the vigils who wore jackets used those to cover the bottom half of their faces, but anyone who saw their smiling eyes would have known how they were really taking in the situation before them.

The roses and tendrils at Christian's foot withered, and when nothing happened in the next five seconds, he turned to the vampires and asked, "I didn't do anything wrong, did I?"

Rafael reluctantly removed his hand covering his mouth and spoke as seriously as he could, which was not serious at all with that broad, teasing smile. "Your Grace, you just broke the forest's heart. How DARE you presume that you've done nothing wrong?!"

Lucianne snorted, then she and Xandar burst out laughing again, which was when some of the river water splashed on the royal couple, and Lucianne protested, "Hey!"

It was finally Christian's turn to laugh, and a beige flower which had small, red polka dots in the inner regions of the petals appeared an inch away from his left foot. The duke looked at it in confusion. Annie had shown him most types of flowers and plants, and taught him what each one meant but he had never seen such a flower in lycan territory.

Rafael teased, "If the flower of friendship doesn't appease you, Your Grace, I'm sure the forest would be more than happy to replace it with the romantic ones from before."

Upon hearing that, Christian leaned down to snatch the flower off the ground and put it into his coat pocket as he spoke to the grass, "Thank you. I really appreciate this. I'm glad there are no hard feelings."

His sights turned to his still-smiling cousin and cousin-in-law when he linked them both in seriousness, 'No one tells Annie about this.'

Lucianne immediately linked back with an excited grin, 'EXCEPT FOR ME!'

Xandar responded, 'Christian, what are you worried about? It's not like you cheated on her with the forest. You ended the relationship before it could even start, and I thought your heartbreaking and friend-zoning days were over.'

Octavia's hand landed on Christian's shoulder when she spoke with more humor than any vigil or minister had seen, "I won't be surprised if our empire is suddenly blessed by your visit, Your Grace. On behalf of our people, Pelly and I send our...most sincere thanks in advance."

The duke narrowed his eyes at the consort, and the mention of Pellethia drew Lucianne's sights to the empress. As her eyes fixed on Pellethia's still-glowing streaks, she began murmuring, "I wonder..." Lucianne looked behind her, where her tail would be if she were in her animal form and Xandar knew what she was thinking.

He pecked a kiss in her hair to get her attention before whispering affectionately, "Only one way to find out."

Her eyes shone in excitement as she went behind a tree to strip and shift, and lo and behold, two of the five stripes glowed. The thickest one in blue, the stripe next to it glowed in emerald green. Xandar's eyes never left her when he picked up her clothes before pecking a kiss on her furry forehead as he muttered into her ear, "Beautiful."

Lucianne's lycan cooed at his affectionate compliment and loving stare. His animal made him nuzzle her nose to elicit her human's soft chuckles through their link. After they were both satisfied with Lucianne's melodious laughter, Xandar took her hand and led her out of her changing spot. When everyone saw her tail glowing, mouths gaped and eyes snapped wide open for the second time that day.

The forest found this an appropriate time to exude a scent that certain insects were attracted to. Within seconds, a swarm of minuscule bugs flew along the scent trail that led into the opened mouths. The alert ones closed their mouths quickly enough to avoid them. Toby and a few others weren't so lucky, and had to spit out the insects when they realized that their mouths had been invaded.

Pellethia was looking at herself using the reflection of the water in the River of Heres, and her eyes snapped to Lucianne when she emerged. They stood side-by-side, and the surface of the water rippled to remove Octavia and Xandar from the reflection, leaving the two women before it added three silhouettes next to a human-form Lucianne and Pellethia, one next to the empress and two next to Lucianne.

Pellethia mumbled, "What does this mean?"

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Lucianne shifted back to make talking easier.

The silhouette next to Pellethia appeared to be someone with a high ponytail and toned arms; the one next to Lucianne looked like a figure that was wearing a cloak; and the last one on the far right had her arms up, probably crossed in front of her chest, and there was something...frilly at her left ear that was visible because her hair was pushed over her right shoulder.

Pellethia uttered, "I don't recognize any of these."

"Neither do I," Lucianne responded as everyone else crowded around them to take a look.

Xandar's arms slid across Lucianne's shoulders and abdomen from behind as he looked at the one with a cloak and thought aloud, "That one has to be a witch. Cloaks are the most common among their species. And that one..." he pointed at the one with the frilly ear, and declared, "...is probably a merfolk. This last one on this side looks like..."

Before he could finish, Greg interrupted, "A huntress."

Juan questioned, "Could this be one of the huntresses we met in the mediation a few years back, Lucy?"

Lucianne studied the silhouette more carefully before she replied, "I don't know. The silhouette is a little too generic if you asked me. Most huntresses have lean bodies and their hair up like that. Without the hair color and approximate height, I won't be able to tell if we've seen her before."

Toby questioned, "Has anyone met any witches or merfolks before by any chance?"

When murmurs of 'no' and headshakes came from everyone present, Lucianne said, "It'll be impossible to have such an opportunity, Toby. Those species closed themselves off centuries ago."

Toby shrugged and casually said, "So did the vampires. Look where we are now. I wouldn't say that integration is impossible after what happened in the past few weeks, especially not after seeing how we're interacting now."

Everyone heard the minister, and none could deny that there was a lot of truth in what he was suggesting. The thought of being able to live in harmony with every species in existence still seemed far-fetched to some like Greg, Margaret and the vigils, who knew that species couldn't even live in harmony

amongst their own kind, let alone with another; it seemed possible for some like Juan, Toby and Lovelace, who used the current interaction with the vampires as basis of how integration could work; and it became an ambitious goal that Lucianne, Xandar, Pellethia and Octavia were determined to reach.

Seeing the river was not going to be projecting anything else, they left the spot and followed the scent trail of baked goods to the Misty Waterfall of Heres. Duica explained that the hideout he and the others found was up ahead, and they crossed the river one by one.

Duica and Bernadette leapt across first, followed by the rulers and other members of the royal family, the ministers and alliance members. When Margaret was stepping on one stone after another that formed a path leading to the other side, she couldn't help but look at the riverbed with those abnormal seaweed, rocks and fish. Her red wolf was wagging its tail in her mind as she admired the sight through her human's eyes.

She didn't realize the last stone was more slippery than the previous ones. Her foot slipped and she gasped, bracing herself for a fall that never came because Tate, who was right in front of her, turned and caught her in his arms just in time.

Her rosewood eyes locked with his brown ones, and he whispered, "You okay?"

She heard him, but couldn't respond. The last time their faces were this close was at the fountain of Labyrinth Vert, when they were close to kissing. Despite her instability, the atmosphere felt the same. It was like their surroundings muted and blurred itself out. Tate felt it too.

After making sure Margaret's feet were planted firmly on the ground, Tate's hand reached for her face. The way his thumb traced her cheek made her feel precious, special.

Toby went up to Lucianne and nudged her in her arm, putting a finger to his smiling lips to get her to be quiet as her curious eyes followed his mischievous ones to Tate. There was no distance between Tate and Margaret, and when their noses touched, Tate instinctively closed his eyes before he leaned in. Margaret was leaning in too, until a flashback from her past came back to haunt her for a microsecond, making her pull away.

Xandar was watching as well, and he felt Lucianne's excited bubble of anticipation deflated into frustrated loss through their bond. He pecked a sweet kiss on her temple just to soothe her.

Lucianne then linked Toby, 'Dang! That was so close!'

Toby chuckled, 'Relax, Lucy. It'll happen.'

'What if we don't see it when it happens?! The first one's always the best.'

As they continued walking, Toby subtly glanced at Xandar before he teased, 'Better not let your mate hear that, Lucy. He might think you're saying the ones that followed weren't as good, and he'll start smooching you in front of everyone here. Besides, who are you to demand seeing Tate's first kiss with Margaret? I don't recall seeing yours.'

Lucianne started blushing and pressing back a guilty smile, and Xandar looked at the two best friends in confusion before he asked, "What?"

Lucianne shook her head immediately and uttered, "Nothing. Let's go."

She barged ahead, and Xandar's furrowed brows went to Toby, who patted him on his shoulder and said, "Nothing serious, Xandar. It was just about how much you love her."

Xandar blinked and asked, "You did tell her it's more than anything and anyone, didn't you?"

"Y-Yeah. Yeah. Definitely." Toby made a mental note to think before he lied next time. He was a good liar with strangers and enemies, but not to close friends and family.

Xandar saw right through the minister's terrible attempt, and he dashed to Lucianne's side within the next second. 'Everything alright, babe?'

She gave a firm nod and responded, 'Of course.'

'What were you and Toby talking about?'

It was frustrating how the mere mention of that conversation could warm up her cheeks and make her lips curl up without effort. She looked ahead as she replied, 'Just...you and me...about the earlier stages of our relationship.'

Xandar's fingers laced with hers when his voice softened as he linked, 'What about it?'

As her thumb stroked the back of his rough hand, she replied, 'Toby said that...I didn't have the right to demand seeing Tate's first kiss with Margaret since our first kiss happened in private.'

'Hm...' his voice took a coquettish turn when his large hands stopped her at her waist as his face closed in on hers while he whispered, "We could try to replicate—"

Lucianne's fingers pressed on his lips to stop him as she uttered sternly, "No. Not here, My King. This is not the time."

She then pecked a kiss on his cheek before breaking free and continued walking forward. Xandar and his animal were happy enough with the kiss, and caught up to their mate again.

Not far behind them, Toby wriggled his eyebrows at Tate when Margaret wasn't looking, and Tate linked, 'Knock it off, Toby. I don't want to make her uncomfortable.' Toby chuckled to himself and looked away.

Margaret witnessed Lucianne's interaction with Xandar, and began to wonder how Lucianne managed to open herself up to a bonded mate's love again after all her rejections. Margaret learned from Zane, who partnered the very talkative Desmond in manipulation practice, that Lucianne had been rejected more times than anyone had ever heard of.

The chatty lycan also reminded Zane ten times to avoid raising the subject unnecessarily because both the king and duke didn't like the queen's past rejections to be brought up, even though the queen herself didn't see anything wrong with it since it was the truth.

Margaret couldn't understand how Lucianne didn't simply close herself off to intimate love. She knew she would. She had only been through one rejection and had been cursing the mate-bond ever since. That was the reason why she was finding it so hard to open up to Tate. She didn't have as much faith in the Moon Goddess's choice as she once did anymore.

She wanted to believe that the connection she felt with Tate now was true and lasting, but there seemed to be an emotional block that was stopping her from getting closer in a way that he wanted her to, that she wanted to too.

As these thoughts occupied her mind, a sharp pain shot up her nape and went to the top of her head as her rosewood eyes turned bright red.

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Like the previous time, Margaret fell to her knees and grunted in anguish. Tate knelt before her and pulled her into his chest, increasing the intensity of the sparks and hoping that it would soothe some of the pain. It did.

Margaret felt less uncomfortable the moment the sparks intensified, and she focused on the vision that her wolf was seeing. She and everyone else around her were in a dimly lit space, and there was something...suspicious about the surroundings. Before Margaret could get anymore information, the vision ended.

That was it? Her rosewood eyes blinked in disbelief, and her awareness brought her back to the present moment. Everyone formed a circle around her and Tate, giving Margaret enough room to breathe but also allow them a good enough look at her. Tate was stroking her shoulder with his thumb, and his scent comforted her wolf and eased her anxiety.

Lucianne studied her in concern. Toby had had enough of the silence, and cleared his throat as he prompted, "Luna?"

Margaret jerked at the title, and Tate shot Toby an 'are you kidding me' look, which made Toby respond in hushed defense, "What?"

Margaret then got up with Tate's help, and she started explaining what she saw.

Greg pinched his nose bridge before he commented, "It'll be a lot nicer if you had more details and elaboration, maggo— Margaret."

He promptly replaced the nickname he gave her after noticing the sharp glare Lucianne was throwing at him. The Alpha was glaring at him too but the duke didn't really care about that one.

They weren't in a dim place yet, so nothing could be done at that moment. Their attention returned to the task at hand. Lucianne turned to look at the metal cover with the symbol of a papilio, her brows pulled together in contemplation.

Octavia muttered, "We're meant to come here."

"What do you mean?" Lucianne asked.

Octavia gestured at the cover and explained, "The papilio is only found in the castle pond, and those animals only reappeared after Pelly's birth."

Xandar asked Pellethia, "When did it last appear before your birth?"

Pellethia responded simply, "When Count Dracula was still alive. The fact that his birth and mine were the only times in history that brought about the papilionibus' existence in the castle pond was more of a taboo than a celebrated coincidence. Father forbade it from ever being raised or spoken about, so not many people know about this. Dracula is said to be...a disgrace to our community for certain stances that he took which were abhorrent to the general society of his time. Father, naturally, didn't want any creature to start a rebellion to dethrone me for the coincidental similarity I shared with Dracula."

Lucianne's sights went back to the papilio on the metal cover as she said, "It doesn't feel like a coincidental similarity anymore."

Xandar agreed, "You've probably the heiress to this forest. The papilionibus were a sign of inheritance."

Pellethia begged to differ. "It's strange though. I know my family's history, and I'm not related to Dracula in the faintest way. Out of all the rulers that led the empire after his death, why am I the destined one?"

"That's the billion-dollar question," Greg muttered to himself from the side.

Lucianne's hand reached for Pellethia's shoulder, and she gave it a gentle squeeze as she spoke with an assuring smile, "Maybe we'll find out one day. Together."

After Pellethia returned her smile, she gave Duica and Bernadette a firm nod to open the cover, and they did. Like the last time the vigils came on their own, nothing came out, much to everyone's relief. The two vigils entered first, and when they turned on the lights and announced that it was safe, the royals dropped themselves down the hole.

The vast space surprised them. It was large enough to house villages of vampires. The moment Margaret entered after Tate, she recognized the surroundings as being the one in her recent vision, and she immediately told Tate, who then linked Lucianne about it.

Lucianne paused in her footsteps, turned and reminded everyone to exercise caution, to be careful of where they step on or what they touch. There may be a trap that the vigils were lucky enough to avoid the last time.

The walls were the first structures Greg checked as soon as his feet hit the ground, but he felt nothing but dry dirt. He then checked the ceiling, and it was odd to him that there was no technology there either. He kicked some dirt off the ground, trying to see if there was any technology underneath the surface but after about half a foot into the dirt, which effectively created a hole, he found nothing. He wasn't satisfied, so he and his top four dug another few holes of equal depth around the area.

Blackfur even asked him why he and his people were 'playing' with dirt. Greg would have retorted with sarcasm had the queen not explained to the dim duke first that Greg may be looking for detectors and traps.

As the royals stood in the middle of the main room, looking for any clues that might lead them to the culprits, some dirt started fragmenting off the ceiling onto Pellethia's hair. She moved aside and looked up, and Octavia pulled her further away. Before anyone said anything, a small object dropped on the ground and the dirt stopped disintegrating.

Even Greg didn't have the technological knowledge to understand how that worked, so he asked, "Okay, what was that?"

Christian answered with a shrug, "Magic."

Greg sighed in frustration as his narrowed eyes found its way to his distant cousin, who didn't even bother pressing back his smile when he exchanged a cheeky look with Xandar. It was nice to annoy Greg for a change.

Lucianne, who Xandar firmly held by her abdomen during the dirt disintegration, tried to lean as close as possible to the pile of dirt to see the last thing that fell. The king was not letting her go any nearer as he studied the ceiling, which didn't seem to be disintegrating anymore.

Octavia made Pellethia stay where she was, and walked forward to retrieve the object. The consort handed it to the empress, and everyone gathered around her to see that it was a scroll. Upon unrolling it, foreign linguistic characters were presented before them, ones that no lycan could read.

“Succoglyphs,” Xandar murmured.

“Translation?” Greg reluctantly muttered, once again reliving his hate for history.

Lucianne responded, “Ancient vampire writings.”