

Chapter 87

Lucianne was surprised that Annie couldn't detect the scent so she asked, "Don't you smell it? There's something pungent, like mercury, salt, granite and something else."

Annie was even more confused, "What? Are you sure, Lucy? I only smell the gas from the exhaust of the cars around here."

Lucianne was sure she wasn't imagining the scent. She continued sniffing as she instinctively pulled Russell closer to her legs. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, a man emerged from behind one of the cars and threw a knife at a low level in Lucianne's way. Lucianne saw him when the knife left his hand, and she reflexively pushed Russell towards Annie as the blade cut into her left leg. Lucianne screamed in agony as she fell to the ground.

The man's eyes showed shock, irritation and loss before he turned to run. Lucianne was weakening, and she couldn't hear Russell crying and screaming her name as Annie held the little boy behind her, shielding him. Lucianne gritted her teeth and got the knife out of her leg before throwing it back at the retreating man. When the knife stabbed into his buttocks and Lucianne saw him fall, her own vision blurred as she used the last ounce of strength she had and mind-linked, 'Xandar...'

In Xandar's study, they were reaching the end of the report when Xandar's eyes glazed over for a mere microsecond. Christian's eyes then glazed over too. The alliance noticed this, and the room fell silent.

Xandar tried linking back his mate but she wasn't responding. He stood from his seat, and his features turned hard with worry as he tried to link her over and over again, his heartbeat increasing by the second when there was nothing by silence from the other end of his link.

Suddenly, he was brought out of his failed attempts by someone tugging the front of his shirt in panicked paces. It was Christian, whose eyes were wide with horror as he screamed out, "CUZ! WE GOT TO GO! WE GOT TO GO NOW! ANNIE'S TAKING THE QUEEN TO THE HOSPITAL! WE GOT TO GO!"

Christian dashed out of the room with Xandar next to him as the alliance followed behind without knowing anything except for the fact that Lucianne was being brought to the hospital. Xandar yelled to his cousin, "WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO HER?!"

Christian continued dashing in the direction of Xandar's garage as he shouted out the explanation, "The Queen was attacked! Someone threw a knife at her, and she's now unconscious! Annie said she's still breathing but she's getting pale."

The alliance who was oblivious before now got worried as well. Juan linked Hale before they all got into their cars and followed Xandar's car with Christian in the passenger's seat. They rushed to the hospital where Annie was taking Lucianne to.

As soon as they reached the hospital and entered through the entrance, the medical staff present stiffened, and the room fell silent before one nurse at the reception yelled out, "Eighth floor, OR 1, your Highness."

Xandar dashed for the emergency stairs as his cousin shouted a 'thank you'. When Xandar found O R I, he saw Annie peering into the operating room with Russell by her side. The little boy was sobbing into the Duchess's pants.

Xandar approached her, and was immediately met with her watered eyes as she said, "Xandar, he came out of nowhere. She smelled something, and then a knife was thrown at her leg. I couldn't do anything to stop him. I'm sorry." Christian finally caught up with Xandar and went to Annie's side as he held her in a tight embrace, letting her tears flow freely onto his shirt.

Xandar couldn't say anything as he peered through the window, where he saw seven people in scrubs running around and inserting tubes into his mate's body. Lucianne laid unconscious on the table, paler than he'd ever seen her. When one of the doctors noticed his presence, she muttered something to the younger doctor next to her before making her way to the door.

When she came out, the alliance arrived. Xandar asked in panic, "What's happening to her? Will she be okay?"

The doctor looked nervous but she tried to stay calm as she began explaining Lucianne's condition, "My King, the Queen has a significant amount of Oleander in her system, especially in her left leg. We're trying our best to get the poison out." Oleander was strong enough to kill a Lycan. Needless to say, it's even more lethal to a wolf. As far as anyone knew, not even a blood transfusion would be able to save a wolf from the poison.

Xandar hated hearing the line 'trying our best' from doctors. It just meant that more likely than not, there was no hope. He growled in anger with glistening eyes and asked in fury, "WILL she be okay?"

The doctor was visibly frightened, "W-We can't tell, your Highness. At least not yet. But we're doing everything we can."

Xandar looked the poor doctor dead in the eye as he said in a low, murderous voice, "Make sure that you do." She nodded and disappeared into the operating room again.

Xandar tried to link his mate, miraculously hoping that she would answer. When she didn't, tears streamed down his hardened face as he thought to himself, 'Baby, wake up. Please, we've been through this! We talked about this just this morning! My heart isn't as strong as yours. I can't afford to lose you. Please, wake up, baby. Please. I'll do anything. Please, just wake up.'

The alliance members were already crowded in front of the window, and Zelena exclaimed a soft 'n o' in despair at the mention of Oleander before Zeke pressed her into his chest. Lovelace's legs gave in at about the same time, and Raden and Sylvia had to support the Luna, letting her fall onto one of the seats at the corridor as she hid her face in both hands. On Lovelace's side, Raden and Sylvia had nothing but anger and worry written on their faces.

Juan peered through the window at his pale-looking sister, and muttered under his breath, "Lucy, you're not done yet. We're not done yet. Please fight."

Toby was muttering to himself with glistening eyes too, "Lucy, we still have that spar. You can't just leave. We had a deal! Lucy, you can't go yet. We still have that spar." He didn't care how merciless his best friend was going to be with him when they trained anymore. He just wanted

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her to be okay again.

Tate was close to crying too, something that he hadn't done in a long time. He spoke to her in his mind, 'C'mon, Lucy. You've been through worse. You can fight through this. We're with you... I'm with you. C'mon, Lucy. Fight!'

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The rumours about the King and Duke's presence in the hospital spread like wildfire, and gossipers somehow managed to find out that the future Queen was being treated there. Chats were sent. Calls were made. News feeds were updated. Soon, journalists started publishing short articles about whatever little they know from their sources.

When Greg saw the news on his notifications bar, his eyes widened in shock. He left his drink at the refreshments table, and left the dining hall in quick paces as he skimmed through the article, trying to find out how Lucianne was hurt. When he got nothing from the list of useless articles except for the name of the hospital where Lucianne was admitted into, he threw his phone on the passenger's seat of his car in frustration and drove faster than he had ever driven, beating all the traffic lights along the way.

When Greg entered the hospital, he asked a nurse where the Queen was before making his way up. He didn't need to read the room labels when he saw the whole party gathered outside OR 1.

Christian was the first to notice his presence, and asked in disdain, "What are you doing here?"

Everyone's heads snapped in Greg's way. Xandar's expression was the most homicidal at that moment. But Xandar never scared Greg. The Duke locked eyes with the cousin he hated before he asked in anger, "What the f*ck happened to her?"

Christian spat, "That's none of your business. Get out of here."

Greg turned to Christian, who he saw as nothing but an annoying pest at the moment, as he said in a low tone, "It's everyone's business. She's our Queen."

"We don't need this to spread anymore than it already has, Greg! Just leave us alone!" Christian shouted.

Greg scoffed at Christian's assumption that he was looking for something to talk about. He tried to not tear-up as he said as calmly as he could, "I couldn't care less what you think I'm here for but I won't leave until someone tells me what happened to her."

Just then, the operating room door opened, and the same doctor emerged from it. She then explained, "Your Highness. Your Graces. The Queen is showing positive signs of recovery."

The tearing alliance members suddenly stopped sniffing as they cleaned the tears on their faces to concentrate on what the doctor was about to say next. "In the last hour and a half, her vitals were malfunctioning when we started the blood transfusion. And there wasn't any improvement even with the new blood we were giving her. We thought that we were going to lose her. But two minutes ago, her heart rate started picking up again. We think she may be...healing herself. We don't know how but she seems to be doing it. Just a moment," she knocked on the glass window twice, and one of the doctors checked the monitor plugged into Lucianne before he signaled a two digit number at her.

The doctor outside with them then said, "It's still picking up. It's a good sign. If she continues to heal at this pace, she'll be able to breathe on her own again soon. Uh, your Grace," she looked at

the tear-strained Annie and asked, "You mentioned that the Queen took out the knife she was stabbed with. We need to contain that knife. Where is it now?"

Annie tried to remain composed as she said, "Sh-She threw it b-back at the man who threw it at her. It stabbed into his bottom. He fell, and I called an ambulance when I was driving here but I don't know what happened to him after that."

The doctor's eyebrows furrowed, "You called an ambulance from this hospital?" Annie nodded.

The doctor's eyes widened, and she took out a phone and quickly dialed a number before waiting for the recipient to pick up the call, "Dr Karr, was a man with a knife in his bottom admitted recently?" After a short moment, she said, "That knife is most likely coated with a lot of Oleander. Not as little as the team suspects. Tell those in the lab to exercise the highest level of caution. No one is to touch the blade. The concentration is probably high enough to burn right through the gloves and their skin! Their faces should be at least ten inches away when they're holding it to run tests. We don't want anyone to faint or go blind."

After she was hung up by her panicked colleague, Greg's infuriated voice rang through the corridor, "HOW THE F*CK DID OLEANDER GET INTO HER SYSTEM?! WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU DOING?! HOW COULD YOU LET IT HAPPEN?!" The Duke's onyx eyes bore into Xandar's.

Xandar was already holding onto all that rage at himself in his chest for the past hour, and what Greg just said erupted the bubbling inferno as he growled and shouted back, "DO YOU THINK I WANTED THIS TO HAPPEN?! SHE'S MY MATE! DO YOU THINK I'LL BE ABLE TO SURVIVE WITHOUT HER?!"

"YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO PROTECT HER!"

"YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW THAT?!"

"THAT'S ENOUGH!" Christian shouted with a growl. He glared at Greg and said, "You wanted to know what happened? Now, you do. Leave."

Greg threw him and Xandar another death glare before disappearing from their sight. He took the stairs to the floor below, and asked a nurse where the man who stabbed Lucianne was being treated. He made his way there, grateful that it wasn't on the same floor as where Lucianne was so he didn't have to bump into his cousins and the alliance members again. He peered through the window to memorise his face. When a nurse emerged, he asked, "What's the status?"

She looked at him in confusion before she asked, "Are you a family member?"

"No." He answered flatly.

"We're not supposed to reveal our patients' information to..."

"How about this? He stabbed the Queen with that knife you just removed from his as*. I'm the Duke. I want to know this scum's status."

The nurse was surprised as she uttered apologetically, "I'm sorry, your Grace. I didn't realize. The man's vitals have failed. We tried to save him with a blood transfusion but it didn't work. He succumbed to the poison on the knife. We're removing life support from him now. We couldn't save him."

"Where's the knife?" Greg asked.

"In our lab. They're running tests. We just got a call that the concentration of Oleander may be lethal but we won't know exactly how lethal until we get the results, your Grace."

Greg took one more hard look at the corpse before he asked, "Have you been able to identify him yet?"

"Yes, your Grace. His name is Harrison Brown. But there wasn't a next of kin listed in his bio so we're still wondering if anyone would come claim his body."

Greg nodded before thanking the nurse and went on his way. He made a call to a familiar number. After two rings, the recipient picked up, and Greg said, "Harrison Brown. Blonde. Six-and-a-half feet. About 165 pounds. I want to know everything, especially who he's been in contact with in the last three weeks."

"Yes, your Grace."

Greg hung up and drove home before drowning down two bottles of scotch. After that, he let his tears flow, and he threw an empty bottle at the kitchen wall with force before he gave way to his weakening feet as he fell to sit on the floor. His eyes reddened, and he thought about all the things he was going to do to avenge Lucianne if his contact told him that Harrison Brown was a hired assassin. 2

After an hour, his contact sent him a document. And after skimming through Brown's profile and finding nothing useful, he went through the call history. His contact took the liberty of identifying the callers whom the scum had been in touch with in the past few weeks. But Greg's eyes were only fixed on the one name he knew. He growled ferociously in his kitchen as he muttered menacingly to the name on his screen, "I told you to do nothing. Now, you've dug your own grave."

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When Lucianne started breathing on her own again three hours later, the doctors removed the air mask and reported the improvements. Her vitals are nearing normal, and she would most likely wake up in the morning. Everyone was relieved. Toby slumped to the ground and looked at the ceiling as he uttered in immense gratitude, "Thank you, Moon Goddess."

Tate and Lovelace managed a relieved smile despite their still-glistening eyes. Juan's pale face started to regain its color as he linked Hale. Christian and Annie felt like a huge weight was taken off their shoulders, and Annie started explaining to Russell that Lucianne was going to be alright. Raden and Sylvia relaxed visibly, their bodies slumped against the wall from their tensed slouching positions.

By far, the most relieved, but the most guilty, was Xandar. The cousin he had always wanted to replace was right. What the hell was he doing?! He was supposed to protect her! And he failed. Again. He pinched the bridge of his nose, and tears formed at the corners of his already teared-strained eyes as he conveyed his gratitude and remorse, 'I am so sorry, Moon Goddess. Thank you for saving her. I won't let her out of my sight again. I am so, so sorry.'

Apart from Xandar, everyone said their goodbyes and reluctantly left the hospital floor. Russell wanted to stay, clinging onto Xandar's leg as he fought against Annie's attempts to pull him away. Xandar bent down and ruffled the little boy's head as he said with the warmest smile he could manage at the moment, "Russell, Aunt Lucy needs to rest now. How about you come see her tomorrow when she's awake?"

"NO! I WANT TO SEE AUNT LUCY NOW!"

Xandar tried again, "Aunt Lucy is really tired, Russell. You wouldn't want to disturb her now, do you?"

"NO! THAT'S WHAT MOMMY SAID ABOUT GRANNY! AND SHE NEVER CAME BACK! I WANT TO SEE AUNT LUCY! I WANT TO SEE AUNT LUCY NOW!"

Everyone was shocked at the words that just came out of the four-year-old's mouth. Xandar finally understood why Russell was being so stubborn. He kept his smile as he uttered, "Alright. We'll go in there and see Aunt Lucy. But you'll have to go home after that. Deal?"

The little boy nodded, and Xandar picked him up and carried him as he opened the door and went to Lucianne's side. Cautiously, he sat on the bed and his free hand reached out to touch his mate's slightly cold and motionless one as he muttered, "I am so sorry, baby."

He lifted her hand up to kiss it. But before he could place her hand back on the bed, Russell took his mate's hand from him and hugged it close to his small chest as he muttered, "Wake up, Aunt Lucy. I'll fight bad guys for you. Please, wake up." 3

Xandar's heart broke when he heard this. He then told Russell, "She'll wake up, Russell. The doctors said so. You can come see for yourself tomorrow."

Russell turned to face the King as he clung on to Lucianne's hand, "You promise?"

Xandar smiled as he whispered, "I promise." After Xandar carefully took his mate's hand from the little boy and placed it gently on the bed, he brought Russell back out for Annie and Christian to take home.

Xandar then went back to his mate. He didn't know how long he stood there despite there being an empty chair right behind him. He just looked at his mate's unconscious body. Her face was getting back its color. He stroked her cheeks that he loved to see blush, and pecked a kiss on her lips which always responded before whispering into her ear, "I love you. Please give me another chance. I'll be better, Lucy. I promise."

After a few hours of standing, his legs finally gave in. He surrendered and sat on the chair. His fingers twined with Lucianne's as he stroked the back of her hand in slow motions, kissing it from time to time.

A little past midnight, a doctor peered through the window and looked at Xandar hesitantly. Xandar assumed that it was about Lucianne's condition so he got up and kissed her on her forehead before whispering, "I'll be right back, my love. I won't take long."

He exited the room, and the nervous-looking doctor adjusted his glasses before bowing and said, "My King, I am Dr Karr. We just finished analyzing the Oleander on the knife. But we also found this." He held up a transparent plastic bag with what appears to be a small sheet of paper with blood smudges. "We thought you might want to have a look at it before we turned it over to the police."

Xandar took it, and held it under the light to read the writing in the dim corridor, which said: This is what you get for crossing me. I warned you. Take your child's death as the first taste of what I can unleash on you and your family.

Xandar's eyes snapped up to the doctor's as he said, "My mate wasn't the target." 4

Dr Karr nodded in agreement, "It appears not, my King. This paper was slit into the knife, like it was meant to be a message to whoever was stabbed with it. The Queen was most likely shielding the child that was with the Duchess, causing the Queen to be stabbed herself. A very noble act but it took a great toll on her body." he peered through the window before returning his sights to Xandar, who handed the note back to him.

The doctor then added, "The Kingdom is blessed to have her, your Highness. We'll look after her while she's here. If the Queen needs anything, do let us know."

"Thank you." he nodded in the doctor's way and returned to the room to hold his mate's hand again.

Xandar kissed her nose before whispering with a small smile, "Told you I won't take long." He stroked her hand before he said, "Our Kingdom has to do better by you, Lucy. You just saved a child, you know that? I've never done anything close in my eighteen years on the throne." he kissed her hand again before uttering, "I love you, baby. I can't wait to see you again."

Chapter 90

At around 3 a.m., Helena Tanner's phone screen lit up. Being careful to not wake her mate, she shifted slowly to reach her phone on her night stand. Her eyes squinted in the dark as she read the message from a number she was careful not to add into her contact list but knew by heart. She threw her covers and stood, which was when her mate asked groggily, "Where are you going? What happened?"

She tried to mask her worry and responded in a flat tone, "Just work. I have to check on something."

"Now?" Her mate asked in disbelief as he checked the illuminated figures on his alarm clock next to him.

Helena forced a smile and kissed her mate on his cheek before explaining, "It's urgent. I'll come back as soon as it's done." Her mate groaned in annoyance before falling back onto his pillow.

Helena put on a sweatshirt over her singlet and didn't bother doing anything with her pants. When she was outside their bedroom, she re-read Greg's message, and her chest started to feel uneasy. 'Your garage. Ten minutes.'

Thank Goddess her garage was far away from everyone's bedrooms. She left through the backdoor, and immediately recognized the Duke's back. She quickened her pace to make sure she was in front of him before her ten minutes were up.

He didn't turn when she was right behind him so she whispered the greeting, "Your Grace."

"Do it." Greg said flatly.

In a flash, two large-sized men appeared from behind Helena and one of them held her in place and covered her mouth before the other injected something in a syringe into her bloodstream from her shoulder.

The Duke then turned indifferently and muttered, "Strangle."

Helena tried to scream but realized that she couldn't. She opened her mouth and exerted the air in her lungs but she couldn't be heard. What happened to her voice?!

Her eyes screamed fear as it met Greg's onyx orbs in the dark. When her vision blurred and she thought that she was going to die, Greg said, "Let her fall." The man holding her threw her against the wall of her garage and let her body fall to the ground as she took in large breaths of air, still voiceless.

When she caught her breath, she tried screaming again but it was to no avail. Greg scoffed darkly and lifted her himself by her neck and pinned her on the wall like he did with Livia the other night.

His onyx eyes bore into hers as he asked rhetorically, "Did you think I'm as careless as you are, Tanner? Did you think I won't take necessary precautions before launching an attack? The substance we just injected in your system blocks your vocal chords so I don't see why you're still

trying to scream. You're not getting out of this."

He threw her to the ground with force, and Helena tried to crawl away but she was backed into a corner. Her mouth moved, like she was pleading with Greg, begging him for mercy. The Duke's growl sent a shiver down her spine when he said, "You wanted to kill her."

Confusion crept into Helena's fearful eyes as she mouthed, "Who?"

Greg lost his patience and took her by her ankle before slamming her body twice against the floor. He only stopped when one of his men said, "Your Grace, we're in no position to tell you how to do your job but if you want to keep her conscious, you'll have to aim less of her head. Anywhere else is fine. Just leave the head."

Lycans heal quickly. And Helena's bleeding head was already recovering though her vision was still a little blurry from the impact. Greg didn't give her time to recover fully before he pressed her knee against the floor, and bent her lower leg upward, breaking her kneecap with the sound of a crack as Helena screamed voicelessly. Cold sweat appeared on her face, and tears flowed in steady streams from her eyes.

The sight didn't make Greg any less merciful. He was still enraged. "I told you to do nothing. I told you to not trigger the Queen. Not only have you tried to trigger her, you wanted to kill her. And with poison. Ha! Pathetic!" His voice broke at the word 'kill' and the words after that didn't mask the hurt and pain he felt.

Despite Helena's agonizing pain, she shook her head and repeatedly mouthed, "I didn't."

"I know how to do my research, Tanner. Stop denying it." Greg said before bending her leg even further. Her features squinted in pain, and she was sobbing in agony. Tanner kept shaking her head as tears streamed down her cheeks, her mouth kept repeating the words 'I didn't'.

Greg scoffed darkly again and suggested, "How about this? The plan was to inject the very same concentration of Oleander you gave to the Queen into you. But now that you're so persistent in denying it, maybe we should give it to your mate and kids instead."

Her eyes widened as she pleaded inaudibly, "No. No. Please, no."

Greg pressed, "Then admit it. You tried to kill the Queen."

"No." She mouthed, and Greg was left conflicted. Normally, when threats were made to the victim's family, they'd give in and tell the truth. Some would even lie and admit to his accusations just to protect their family. Tanner was insisting that she didn't try to kill Lucianne. Did his contact screw up on the Harrison Brown research?

He let go of her leg and let it fall as he stood to think. He leaned casually against the wall as he pondered on his predicament. His men opted to say nothing, and just watched Tanner to make sure she didn't try to run away. It wasn't as if she could. Her kneecap hurt unlike anything she'd ever experienced in her life.

Greg had a plan. But he didn't really like it. It felt too merciful. He approached Tanner in slow steps. The click of his shoes was the only sound echoing through the walls of the large garage. He stood before the fidgeting woman and said in a low voice, "Here's what's going to happen, Tanner.

I'm going to give you an antidote for your vocal chords. When I start hearing that irritating voice of yours again, you'd better be talking about only what I want to know. If you say anything irrelevant, I'll kill your family. And if anyone hears us, I'll kill your family. Is that clear?"

Tanner nodded. It wasn't like she had a choice. Greg then uttered his men's way, "Do it." And they did. One held her still while the other injected another substance into the same area. In less than a minute, Tanner found her voice again when she could hear her own heavy breathing from the pain that Greg had just inflicted upon her.

Greg then started, "Who is Harrison Brown?"

Tanner shook as she stuttered in a whisper, "I-I hired him t-to g-go after s-some f-former employees. It wasn't the Queen, I swear!"

"What former employees?"

Tanner kept her three employees' absence from the Duke, thinking that she could eliminate them and cover her tracks before he found out, got mad and came after her for being unable to keep them in place. She stuttered again, "T-They d-do the au-audits."

Greg's eyebrows furrowed. He squatted and looked her dead in the eye as he asked, "THE audits?" She nodded.

"So, the people who know what we've been doing are NOT within your reach anymore. Is my understanding correct?"

Tanner nodded in dismay, and the gears in Greg's head started turning. He replayed whatever little he knew about what took place in Tanner's office when his cousins and Lucianne went there. The employees were manipulating the audits for years but they never disobeyed Tanner for the King.

Greg doubted Xandar used the King's Authority on them to get the real story. His cousin was too much of a chicken to ever wield that power. That pathetic second-in-command is just a mindless upper-rank servant to the King. There was no way he got them to blurt it out either. The only reason that the employees decided to give in after all these years was "Lucianne." Greg subconsciously muttered under his breath, and he sought some comfort in saying her name.

Tanner was depleted but she was still shocked at the Duke's softened features when he said that name.