

Chapter 13

Ivy

When dawn breaks, I go without a visit from Abbie, leaving a void that's hard to ignore. Had Kyson forbid her from coming to visit me? I try to shake off the feeling of abandonment, telling myself she must be busy, but the ache in my chest doesn't ease even as the day comes to an end. Today I've barely seen anyone. Damian told me Kyson went on a rampage after waking next to me and has kept everyone busy ordering them around. In an attempt to distract myself, I decide to help Peter with his outside chores, and now we are picking oranges.

Damian had mentioned it was alright, as long as I did not venture into the castle. And after last night, I don't want to risk any run-ins with the king, so that isn't something he has to worry about.

As I move from orange to orange, my hands mechanically go about their task, but my mind is somewhere else. I think of the castle, the king and his people, of our complicated lives interwoven in a sticky web of mistrust and secrets. The simple

task is a small comfort, a momentary escape from the chaos until I suddenly see him out of the corner of my eye.

Kyson emerges from the tree line, clad in just shorts, a clear sign he has just returned from his run. His presence sends a jolt of anxiety through me. He's always an imposing man, but today, with his casual attire and intense demeanor, he's particularly daunting. He stops when he notices me, eyes taking me in as mine do the same to him. For a few seconds, he simply stands there studying me as if trying to make up his mind about something. There's something in his eyes that speaks of pain and longing, and I can't help but wonder if the bond torments him the same way it does me. All I want to do is throw myself in his arms and beg for forgiveness, but I remain where I am, too scared to move as I return his stare.

His hair is messy, cheeks flushed and chest heaving under the sunlight while beads of sweat run down the valleys of his abs. He is tall, with broad shoulders and strong arms. His legs are taut, his stomach toned and sculpted. He's in peak physical form, no signs of weakness or weariness. While standing near him, I feel even more inferior, weak. The only sound out here is his ragged breath as he stands watching me, trying to decide what to do with me, to say to me.

"Orange, My King?" Peter, ever so kind, offers Kyson an orange, cutting through the awkward tension but the king's

reaction is anything but gracious. His voice is sharp, laced with command.

“Why is she here?” he demands. Peter looks back at me in confusion when I hear the door behind us open that leads to the kitchens and laundry. Kyson turns his attention and I see Damian step out the door.

“I thought I told you she wasn’t to come to the castle,” he snaps at Damian, his tone icy.

“She isn’t in the castle. She is picking oranges, Kyson,” Damian tries to explain, his voice tinged with a plea for understanding.

Not wanting to cause more trouble, I quietly retreat to the stables, the king’s voice still ringing in my ears as he and Damian argue. Peter follows, worry written all over his face.

“Are you okay, Ivy?” he asks, his voice filled with concern.

“I don’t want to get you in trouble, Peter. Please, just go,” I whisper, urging him away. He hesitates, torn between concern and also not wanting to earn the king’s wrath, but eventually

leaves me alone, and I continue walking back to my new home, the stables.

In the stables, I try to make a bed out of old sheets and Kyson's clothes, which Gannon had sneakily provided. But emotions get the better of me, and I start tearing the clothes apart as frustration and sadness grips me. Each rip feels like a release, but it brings no peace, only a sense of deepening despair. I want to scream, want to cry, want anything other than this empty grief that fills me. I feel like I am rotting from the inside out, that my life is decaying before my eyes. At least back at the orphanage, I knew how each day would be with Mrs. Daley. Now I can't prepare for the next five minutes. His mood swings are unpredictable.

I could prepare for back breaking chores and frequent lashes. I endured it and lived and breathed and choked on that life. Coming here gave us hope, we could finally breathe, we were finally free. But why does this hurt more? Why does the bond sting feel so much more intensely brutal? Here, it's more than just my body suffering. It's my heart... my soul. The glimpses of a different kind of life, a safe life... only to have it ripped away as quickly as it came.

When I finally calm, I peer down at my makeshift den by the furnace only for another wave of devastation to hit me. I've ruined Kyson's clothes. Desperately, I snatch them up, sniffing

for his scent, but it's gone. My tantrum has robbed me of that small comfort, and it breaks my heart painfully as I ignore the shooting pain of my hand while searching for his scent, yet all I get is a nose full of earth and dirt. The lack of even that minor comfort makes the hollow feeling inside my chest worsen as my bond cries out for him.

Curling up in a ball, with the shredded remnants, I lay there, feeling more alone than ever. The echoes of the king's anger and the loss of his scent haunt me, replaying in my head. Now my own mind taunts me, telling me how stupid I was to let my anger get the better of me, now I am not only without my mate but without anything to keep me warm. I close my eyes, seeking escape, even if it's just for a moment. But escape doesn't come, and I'm left with the stark reality of my situation, a reality that's becoming increasingly difficult to bear.