

Chapter 16

Ivy

The morning light filters through the cracks of the stable, casting a golden hue over the hay and dust particles dancing in the air. I wake up alone, the space beside me cold, telling me Kyson is gone and must have left a while ago. However, someone has draped one of his blankets from his room over me, making me wonder if he sent someone to get it because it's covered in his scent. My heart sinks a little deeper, the loneliness once again settling in like an unwelcome guest. I sit up, rubbing the sleep from my eyes, the events of last night replaying in my mind like a nightmare I can't escape.

The bear, the fear, Kyson's unexpected rescue—it all feels surreal, like a twisted fairy tale where the prince is also the monster. I shiver, pulling my blanket closer around me. The stables, now once again, feel like a prison.

As I gather my thoughts, the sound of footsteps approach.

The stable door creaks open, and Damian's silhouette appears against the morning light. He looks concerned, his brows furrowed as he surveys my disheveled state. The sight of him, a familiar face in this whirlwind of chaos, brings a small sense of relief.

Damian's voice breaks the silence, carrying a hint of hope I cling to desperately.

"Morning, My Queen," he says excitedly. Confused by his cheery tone, I get up, my body hurting from the rough ground and the emotional turmoil that won't let up.

"Morning, Damian," I manage to say, my voice hoarse from the tears and screams of the night.

He steps closer, his expression softening. "You've had a rough night," he observes, extending his hand to help me up.

I nod, accepting his help. As I stand, the stiffness in my muscles reminds me of the ordeal I went through.

"We need to get you cleaned up and into a more comfortable place," he suggests, and I glance at him, wearing a silly smile I hadn't seen before.

“I’m allowed to shower?” I ask as he guides me out of the stable. The fresh air hits me, a welcome change from the stale, heavy atmosphere inside.

As we walk, I can’t help but glance back at the stables, the scene of so much fear and confusion. It’s hard to leave it behind, even harder to face the uncertainty that awaits me in the castle.

Damian leads me along the path, his grip firm but gentle. I’m grateful for his support, for his understanding. He doesn’t press me for details, doesn’t bombard me with questions like one would expect, but I know Kyson and the guard would have filled him in.

“Yes, I have some good news,” Damian says. “Come on!”

Confused, I furrow my brow as he waves his hand in front of me to grab my arm. I look at it before placing my good hand in his. He places it on his arm and tucks his arm to his side. I raise an eyebrow at him as he starts up the path leading back to the castle. For a second, hope flares to life, only to die down when he speaks again.

“The king said you can stay in his old quarters; you will be more comfortable up there,” he says, and I stop. Beta Damian also stops and peers down at me.

“He said I could come back?” I ask hopefully. Beta Damian glances at Gannon for a second before turning his gaze back to me.

“He didn’t, did he?” I ask, sorrow hitting me once again.

“I convinced him, but he is aware you will stay in his old room,” Damian tells me.

“His old room?” I whisper, holding back tears.

“Yes, the room he currently uses used to be his sister’s,” Damian explains.

“Before my mother killed her,” I sigh, still unable to believe she killed someone. It all feels surreal. Nevertheless, Damian escorts me back to the castle, and as we approach the castle doors that lead into the foyer, open and Kyson steps out.

He stops in his tracks before eyeing my hand on Damian's arm. His eyes flicker and he growls. I yank my hand away before his eyes go to mine for a second before going to Damian.

"Find me when you're done," the king says, not bothering to acknowledge my existence before he turns and stalks off toward where the cars are waiting out front of the castle.

I stare after him while pain ripples through my chest at his dismissal of me. Gannon growls before following him, and Damian glances down at me.

"Come on, I will show you where he put you," Damian says, tugging me inside.

"You mean where you decided to put me? He doesn't look so happy I will be here," I tell him.

As I enter, I notice the room is bigger than Kyson's, though I could tell it has remained untouched by the thick layers of dust on the furniture and appliances. One of the servants is in here trying to clean it up, uncovering all the furniture that was covered by sheets. It feels weird watching her try to clean the place, and I move to help her when Damian stops me, pointing to the bathroom.

“Bathroom is through there. I will help her. Go take a shower and get cleaned up. I placed some of Kyson’s clothes in the closet for you. It might help with the discomfort. Gannon said you struggled last night, My Queen.”

The female servant watches me curiously at his words. I frown that she is expected to clean this room, all because I would be staying in it. It’s too big of a task for one person.

“I will help. Go get cleaned up,” Damian says, nudging me toward the bathroom. With a sigh, I give up.

I smell terrible after spending all night in the stables. The girl had already restocked the bathroom, everything shiny and clean. A fresh towel hung on the side of the huge spa bath that sits in the center. Across the far wall stands an open shower, no screen, just two shower heads protruding from the wall and a drain that runs along the entire back of the bathroom.

All the counter space is made of black marble and the floors slate. All the finishings are gold and it has double basins. It makes me wonder if Kyson stayed in the other room just to feel close to his sister because this room is much more luxurious and as big as his entire quarters. I shower quickly, washing all remnants of the stables off. Finally feeling clean, I emerge out

in my towel, wondering where the closet is that Damian spoke of.

I go to ask when I notice the room is empty, yet all the furniture is uncovered, and the curtains are drawn. No dust in sight makes me realize just how much quicker Lycans are than common werewolves.

Wandering through the room, I open a door, finding an untouched office with the furniture still covered. I quickly close the door before opening another and finding a library. However, the shelves are bare, and the room is dark. Not that I could read anyway, so there's no point in a stocked library. Yet it makes me think of Kyson and his love for reading.

Moving across the room, I roll my eyes, having missed the door next to the bathroom, which would be the most obvious place for a closet. I walk over to it and grip the handle, pulling it open.

His scent hits me like a punch in the chest. A few of his clothes are hung, but I recognize a few pieces I knew were from his room. Stepping in, his scent becomes even more overwhelming, and my heart aches as I clutch it. It brings me to my knees.

Not caring for my injured hand, I start ripping the clothes off the hangers. I need his scent, need him as I curl up in a ball among his clothes. Some primal, instinctual part takes over all rational thought and sends me wild with uncontrollable grief.

My entire body is anxious as I claw at the ground. I feel unhinged, uncontrollable, and I curse him as much as I long for him. Surely no one can survive this sort of heartache.

My instincts are all over the place. Time stands still, and I have no idea how long I've been in here when the door opens.

A violent growl escapes my throat, and my claws sink into the soft gray plush carpet, slicing through it like a hot knife through butter. A woman, whoever was at the door, jumps back, startled, pulling away from me just in time to see her face. Recognition returns to me, and I scramble after her to apologize, but she is already gone.

The door shuts behind her with a soft click. My skin feels like it is crawling as I claw at it, suddenly feeling cold, and the urge to go back to my den. The smell of food hits my nostrils, and I peer over at the table between the armchairs and fireplace to notice the bowl of hot soup. I wrinkle my nose because the strong odor is tainting the scent of my mate. Turning, I walk

back to the closet and shut the door before burrowing back inside my den.

As I nestle deeper into Kyson's clothes, their familiar scent wraps around me like a cocoon. It's a bittersweet comfort, a reminder of what I long for and what seems so out of reach. My mind returns to Kyson, to the complexity of our bond, and to the pain that seems to be its constant companion.

The loneliness is overwhelming, suffocating. I close my eyes, trying to escape into memories, into a time when things were simpler, when my heart wasn't torn in two. But the memories are elusive, slipping through my fingers like sand.