

Chapter 18

Ivy

As the days slip by, his scent lingers a little less. Each day passes, my senses sharpen, my mind clears, and I slowly rediscover remnants of who I am. After so much solitude, I have gradually returned and found my identity, no longer ruled by unfamiliar instincts.

Agony is the only word to describe it. One thing becomes clear: I cannot shift. It saddens me, and I wonder if it's because of the bond like Gannon mentioned all those days ago, or if I'm just a failure in yet another aspect of life.

I have vague memories of the king coming into the room. I remember him healing my hand, but that was the last time I saw him. The king said he'd be gone for two days; however, it's been much longer. I don't know how long it's been since I left this room, left my den, but I feel a considerable amount of time has passed.

As the days drag on, they become more manageable, a little less painful. Once Kyson's scent is gone, and only my scent remains in the room, I realize my den no longer fulfills its original purpose, and the bond is now only a distant memory, or so I hope.

Eventually, I can see my surroundings again. Clarity returns, and the fog lifts. It's like someone flips a switch, and everything either goes numb or dies off. I'm not sure which one, but I don't care. I can finally breathe, finally feel more like myself than I have in days.

As one of the servants slides a tray across the floor just inside the door, I'm drawn to the sound of the door creaking open. I get up and move toward her, and she shrieks, the noise startling me and making me jump back and away from her. She quickly slams the door shut behind her. The smell of eggs wafts to my nose, and my stomach rumbles hungrily. How long has it been since I've eaten?

Peering down, I realize I have no clothes on, making my eyes widen in shock. How long have I been naked? Shaking my head, I rush to the cupboard to find some clothes. Everything is shredded.

I look at the torn sheets and curl my lip in disgust as I scoop them up and sniff them. My scent is potent on them, and I definitely need to find something clean to wear.

Claw marks have shredded through every scrap of cloth in this room, which makes me look at my fingertips. How did I do that? When I can't even shift? It puzzles me - like I had been in some sort of trance and someone else had taken over.

Shaking my head, I grab some of the longer pieces and make a sarong out of them. I look like a peasant. I chuckle at the thought as I stand in front of the mirror in the bathroom.

Mrs. Daley would have whipped me good for my seamstress skills, or lack thereof. Oh well, it did the trick. Wandering out of the bathroom, I retrieve the tray from the floor by the door.

I move toward the fireplace and sit on the floor by the coffee table. My hands tremble as I pick up the fork. I practically inhale my food, barely tasting any of it.

I am ravenous. When I finish, I wander around the room, wondering if I'm allowed to leave it. An hour passes and no one enters, so I walk to the bedroom doors leading in with my empty tray in hand.

No one is standing outside my door, no guards or anything, so I figure I must be allowed to leave the room. I stare down at my lovely bedsheet attire and shake my head.

Yep, I'm doing this; I'm going to walk down to the kitchen and pray no one sees me in my sheet sarong or notices the fact I have no clothes on underneath it or peek at my ass, which I know isn't fully covered because I can feel the draft from the open bedroom window caress against me. This is mortifying, but seriously, it can't be any worse than the king rejecting our bond, so I shrug and step out. If I can survive that agony, then I can survive a little embarrassment.

As I move through the corridors trying to remember the way, one thing becomes obvious: no one is on this side of the castle. The place is ghostly and quiet until I come to the stairs.

Straight across are the king's quarters, yet here, too, is also silent, and no guards stand or line the corridors. It is eerily quiet, maybe because it is so early in the morning. The sun is only just rising. However, I think it's a little strange. Descending down the stairs, it is the same.

Where is everybody? I can't figure it out. I find the kitchen is also empty as I make my way to the laundry room and retrieve

a servant's uniform. I'm not daring enough to enter the king's quarters in search of clothes.

I'm afraid my nose will pick up his mouth-watering scent and I'll be plunged back into the darkness the bond held me in for days.

The sound of a horn in the distance makes me move to the laundry window as I button up my uniform to see everyone down by the river running back to the castle.

The entire palace must be down there, I think to myself. Grabbing some flats from the shelf, I slip them on and step out the back door to where the long clotheslines are.

This side of the castle is surrounded by fruit trees and gardens. Sheets flap along with the breeze as I make my way down the back to the hill, where I can see everyone standing still as statues, staring out at the horizon. I keep close to the trees, wanting to know what's going on, but also to go unseen.

All uniformed guards stand in rows, and people from the town outside the castle gates take up most of the hill. Unable to see, I walk out of my hiding place and stop beside one of the guards. I peek my head around, trying to see what's going on.

The guard looks down at me, and I peer back at him in confusion when I see his eyes glaze over. Moments later, Gannon is beside me. He leads me down the hill, bringing me to where Abbie stands at the front with Clarice and the castle servants.

Only then do I realize why everyone is gathered here. It's a cemetery. Hundreds and hundreds of black marble headstones line the flat before the river.