

Chapter 19

Ivy

My stomach drops, and I look at Abbie, who seems shocked to see me, but she stays quiet. She reaches over and grips my fingers with hers. The king stands at the front, where I see thirteen fresh graves dug. He stares off vacantly toward the path leading to the surrounding forest.

I can only see his side, but he must sense my stare because he turns his head and looks at me. His eyes meet mine, and my heart sputters in my chest. He then turns his gaze away, as if I am merely another servant or member of the public.

Time seems to stop, and I suck in a breath when I see the open graves. I peer around before seeing a succession of coffins being carried to the grave sites where the king stands.

I have no idea what happened, but one thing is clear to me: most of the coffins belong to children or small adults. Four of them,

I can tell, are adult-sized coffins, but the other nine are child-sized coffins.

The guards carrying them stop by a grave and set them down before music starts playing from a violinist who I hadn't noticed was at the side by the water. It's complete silence while we wait for the coffins to be lowered into each grave.

Nobody speaks or even whispers. We merely watch. Something happened; that much is apparent. I wonder briefly if this is where the king had gone. If so, when did he return to organize all this?

When it finishes and the coffins are laid to rest, a horn blares again. After a few minutes, everyone starts climbing the hill and leaving. The place is packed.

However, I notice the king remains. Abbie grabs my arm and tugs me up the hill, back toward the castle. I feel she's almost vibrating beside me, squeezing my hand like she can't believe I'm holding it.

We go back in through the laundry, following Clarice. The moment I step inside, I am crushed between the two of them as they smother me in their warmth.

“You’re back?” Abbie gushes while squeezing me tight. Clarice cups my face in her hands, her eyes teary, and she lets out a breath. I’m about to ask what happened when the king suddenly enters the room. His scent hits me like a brick to the face, and I’m stunned in my tracks.

“Get back to work,” the king snaps at us before stalking past us without so much as a backward glance. I swallow and stare after him as he passes through the kitchens.

Gannon and Damian follow him as he leaves without acknowledging my existence. I bite the inside of my lip. The pain helps the pang of hurt that courses through my chest as the metallic taste of my blood washes over my tongue.

“He will come around,” Clarice tells me, gripping my shoulder, but I’m sick of hearing it. Sick of losing days to a bond he broke. I’m not going to wait around and hide in my room for him.

Nope, I decide to keep busy, and everything can go back to how it was. Just me and Abbie against the world, the way it used to be. So, with that, I grab some cleaning supplies, ignoring Clarice’s protests that I’m not a servant, and follow Abbie to help her do her chores, which she’s excited about.

Finally, I'm doing something other than wallowing and hiding away from everyone. Abbie tells me the king returned yesterday morning and spent the day hand digging the graves himself, refusing help when the guards tried to step in and take over. He apparently spent the night destroying his room before Damian dragged him off to train with the guards.

The day passes by quickly as we busy ourselves, and it feels good to move around, using muscles I barely used in days. However, Abbie becomes antsy and jittery toward the end of the day.

"Are you okay?" I ask her, as she's practically bouncing on her feet.

Suddenly, I hear Gannon growling behind us. He's been following us around for most of the day; I don't know if he chose to or if Gannon was ordered to follow us by the king. I'm not sure, and I never ask. If the king is going to pretend I don't exist, that's fine, but I'm not waiting around for him to change his mind any longer.

Clarice sighs and looks over at her, where we stand on the other side of the kitchen counter. She then rolls her eyes before speaking. "Go on then," she says with a dismissive wave. Abbie

squeals before grabbing me, pecking my cheek, and rushing off out of the kitchen.

“Wait, where are you going?” I call after her, but she’s already gone and out of earshot. I turn to Clarice, who clicks her tongue and shakes her head.

“You should head up to your room, Ivy. I’ll send someone up with your dinner,” Clarice tells me, and I furrow my brows. What’s going on? I turn to look at Gannon, who’s glaring at the wall above our heads. Clarice clears her throat, which seems to snap him out of the homicidal stare-off he’s having.

“Right, I’ll escort her up,” Gannon says, but I wave him off. Only he insists on following. When I reach the top of the staircase, I notice Damian coming out of the king’s room with a tray.

He starts stalking toward us, but I quickly rush off to find my room before locking myself in with a sigh. Abbie and I fixed the room up and cleaned it earlier today, but I’m met with silence as I sit on the sofa in front of the fireplace. This room is too big to just sit in by yourself.

The silence surrounding me is deafening, and after a few hours of absolute silence, I go in search of Abbie's small room, which I know is in Beta Damian's quarters.

However, when I reach the lower level and find her room, her bed is empty. Abbie's small room is much like the one I was originally in when I was still the king's servant. Her scent perfumes the room and brings me comfort, so curling up on her bed, I wait for her to return.