

Chapter 2

Ivy

I'm taken to the stables, which is by a huge manmade dam. As we approach the stable, I notice a few guards coming out having unlocked it, watching me with curious and awkward eyes. The porch front has a roof that overhangs and a few old rickety rocking chairs that overlook the dam and pier. It's surrounded by a wide array of plants, flowers, and herbs. The air is moist here and the smell of fresh hay lingers in the air.

Inside the stable, several horses are standing in their stalls. A few of the horse's whine in greeting as I walk by. I stop, staring at the huge white one. I reach out my hand to stroke the velvety muzzle of it. The horse pushes its head into my palm as if it wants more when Dustin nudges me forward.

I am mesmerized by the beauty of the horses, yet glancing around, I never pictured I'd be living with them. I guess I can't truly escape the fact I am a rogue, and this is far more than I deserve. I should be grateful he didn't kill me because it was clear he wanted to.

“Quick, sit while I try to take care of your hand,” Dustin urges, dragging a cut in half wine barrel over. He flips it over, so I can sit on it. The other guard growls at him before gripping his shoulder, and Dustin glares at the man’s hand touching him. Staring up at the man, he glares at me with so much venom, I instinctively drop my gaze.

“We were told to bring her here, that is all,” he snaps at Dustin. He is only trying to help fix my hand? I steal another peek at the man, who stares back at me like I am the scum of the earth, and I quickly avert my gaze again.

“Remove your hand, Trey, or you’ll fucking lose it,” Dustin snaps at him.

“I’m following orders; the king said bring her here, and that is it, not fucking help her. She doesn’t deserve help after what she did,” he spits, but no one has told me what it is I did yet? If I know, maybe I can correct it or make amends. Did I forget one of my chores?

“Fuck the king,” Dustin snaps, and the man’s grip tightens on Dustin’s shirt, who goes to turn when Gannon walks in.

“Yes, fuck the king. Remember where your loyalties lie, Trey,” Gannon warns him.

“They are with my king. Not with a traitor!” Trey answers.

“That so-called traitor is your queen and the king’s mate,” Gannon snarls at him, and the man whimpers before his eyes go to me.

“You haven’t been here as long as the rest of us, but the king swore us all to choose his queen over him.”

“If so, why is she down here, then?” the man demands.

“Because the king is an idiot. Move, Dustin. I will wrap her hand. Go fix up the old king’s quarters for me,” Gannon says, crouching down in front of me.

“He’s letting her back inside the castle?” Dustin says, looking relieved.

“Hopefully Damian can convince him. This is no place for a queen,” Gannon tells him.

“Just get it ready for me. The moment I can take her back safely, I want it ready,” Gannon explains.

“Yes, sir,” Dustin says, while Trey growls and Gannon glances over his shoulder at him.

“You’re off guard, get out of my face,” Gannon orders him, and I feel his aura rush out and Trey doubles over before hustling out.

Gannon sets to work on cleaning my hand and wrapping it. “It will heal once you shift. Do you think you can hold off a couple of hours?” he asks kindly. My hand is throbbing. Can’t he give me his blood or heal it like the king did my back? Right now, I will try anything if it means the pain will stop.

“Can’t you heal it?” I ask, hopefully. My hand is throbbing to its own beat, my fingers are black and purple, and fragmented bones are pushing beneath my skin like splinters when the frame broke them.

Gannon chews his lip nervously and then sighs.

“I would if I could, but only the king can heal you. My saliva or blood won’t work on you since you aren’t mine,” Gannon tells me, cupping my face with his huge hand. What does he mean? I thought all Lycans can heal.

“Did the king refuse you to?” I ask him and he frowns. “No, Ivy. But Lycans can only heal their mates,” he tells me.

He pulls his phone out of his pocket. “Once the moon is at its highest peak, I will take you outside, so you can shift, My Queen,” Gannon says.

“Please don’t call me that,” I murmur, looking away from him. As he said, this is no place for a queen, a slave maybe, but not a queen, and clearly Kyson doesn’t want me to be his.

“I need to ask you something,” Gannon says, unlocking his phone and scrolling through the pictures. He stops before turning his phone to me.

“Do you know this woman?” he asks, and I take the phone from him. A whimper escapes from my lips when I realize it is my mother. I nod, tears trekking down my face.

“She’s my mom,” I smile, brushing my thumb over the picture of her. She looks a little younger than I remember in this picture, but I know it is her. Gannon hangs his head and shakes it. He sighs heavily before looking up at me.

“He will come around, Ivy. You just need to give him space,” Gannon tells me.

Come around to what? I think. How does everyone seem to know what’s going on except for me?

“What do you mean? I don’t get it. What did I do wrong?” I ask. Gannon frowns when I see his eyes glaze over, and I can tell he is mind linking. I wait for him to finish, and his eyes flicker before falling back on me.

“You did nothing. It’s what your mother did. She killed the Landeena king and queen; she also killed the king’s sister.”

I blink, astonished, unable to believe what I’m hearing. That would be impossible. She couldn’t have.

“Just try to get some rest. After your shift, I will take you to Kyson’s old quarters, he can’t keep you down here forever, it will drive his Lycan side mad.”

“But my birthday isn’t for another couple of weeks,” I tell him.

“The fact you recognized the king as your mate, Ivy, shows your birthday is today,” he says, just as I hear someone curse.

The stable door opens, and hope bubbles in me at the thought of it being Kyson to tell me this was some sick joke, but it is just Clarice and Abbie. They stop by the door and glance at Gannon, who nods to them before standing and leaving. He stops by Clarice at the door.

“Don’t be long; I don’t want to be dragging you to the cells for disobeying the king,” Gannon tells them. Clarice nods before rushing in with Abbie close behind her. Abbie embraces me, hugging me then checking me over, while Clarice stands with a frosted cupcake in her hand, a deep look of concern on her face.

“You’ve been baking,” I tell Abbie, whose uniform is covered in flour. She shakes her head.

“No, I just spilled the bag on the counter before I came down here. Clarice made a cake for you,” she tells me, dusting herself off.

“Well, I had a cake made, but I couldn’t carry it down,” Clarice says sadly.

Abbie falls to her knees beside me, her eyes wide with excitement. Excitement that quickly dims. “You should have seen it, Ivy. Clarice did a good job. She spent all day making it. It’s so pretty, better than the ones we used to make at the orphanage, it...” Abbie trails off before frowning.

“You enjoy it then,” I tell her, knowing just how much we always wished to celebrate our birthdays but were never allowed. We had been strictly forbidden to make ourselves birthday treats or sample the other treats we made in the kitchen. Abbie and I would stare longingly at them. We never knew if they tasted alright, but the delight on the kids’ faces told us they must have, or maybe they were just being polite.

Clarice nervously glances at the stable doors. “We can’t stay long; Gannon is right; the king is on the warpath, but I couldn’t let you go without wishing you happy birthday,” Clarice says, placing the blue cupcake in my hand. She stabs a candle in it and lights it with a match, while I stare at the flickering flame.

This was never how I pictured my birthday to be, not that I ever saw myself actually celebrating one, the one chance I might have had was now stolen from me once again, yet this one hurts the most. Maybe because for a second, I thought it was going to be a good day.

“Blow it out and make a wish,” Clarice says, and to humor her, I do. Abbie smiles sadly and kisses my knee where she is crouched beside me, her green eyes filled with tears.

“What did you wish for?” Clarice asks, a teary smile on her face.

“I wished to be free,” I whisper, and Abbie sobs.

“Don’t,” she chokes the word as if it strangles her. “Don’t say that,” Abbie cries.

“I think it’s a good wish,” Clarice says, staring in confusion at Abbie.

“Not where we come from. The only freedom rogues get is in death,” Abbie chokes out, and Clarice stares back at me, bewildered, before grabbing my face in her shaking hands.

“You wish for anything but that. Do you hear me? I will not watch my queen die. I have buried enough of them,” she chokes out before letting me go, then leaving out. Abbie watches her go before gazing back at me.

“I wish I could stay to see you shift,” she says, and I nod, terrified of the thought of shifting with no one here, in a stable of all places, surrounded by hay and horses. I think I would have preferred being locked in my room at the orphanage, at least I’d have had Abbie.

“It’s not too bad. We have slept in worse places,” Abbie says, glancing around, trying to uplift my mood.

“I will speak to Beta Damian. Maybe he can convince the king to let me stay here with you, or I can try to sneak down,” Abbie says, and I shake my head.

“No, stay in the castle; you don’t need to be punished, too,” I tell her. Abbie stares at me confused, while chewing her lip.

She sighs heavily and glances around at the horses. “This isn’t how I pictured today being,” she admits.

“Well, I never pictured making it to this day at all,” I remind her and her eyes dart to me.

“More than my life,” she whispers, and I swallow.

“More than my life,” I return to her, and she lets out a relieved breath.

“Abbie, love, you need to go,” Gannon tells her, and I see her cheeks turn a little pink. I chuckle at Abbie, a silly smile on my lips. She doesn’t get flustered much, but just that one endearing word sent her crimson. She nods before standing and kissing my forehead.

“I will try to come back. If I don’t, I will tomorrow,” Abbie says, rushing back to the door. She looks up at Gannon as she passes him.

“I won’t leave her alone. Once she shifts, I will sneak her back into the castle,” Gannon tells her before reaching for a lock of her auburn hair. He twirls it around his finger and then clears his throat before nodding and letting her rush off. I raise an eyebrow at him.

“What, she’s pretty,” Gannon says, shaking his head like he just got caught doing something he shouldn’t.

“Yes, she is,” I tell him with a smile, and he blushes slightly, clearing his throat.