

Chapter 20

Abbie

I'm waiting with Clarice for the burial to start. We're holding a luncheon in the ballroom for the staff, but I won't be attending. I've agreed to meet Kade this afternoon, but still, I help set it up after my altercation with Gannon. I notice Gannon coming down with the king. It saddens me when he looks my way, only to look away. Guilt courses through me, and I turn my attention straight ahead, holding back the emotion that threatens to choke me. In an ideal world, Gannon would have been my mate, but I have a mate and can't throw him away, either. I've never had anything, and Kade is mine, and I will fight for that, even if I don't know what I'm fighting for exactly.

The ceremony is just beginning as everyone waits on the hill. It's only moments later when I notice movement at my side and glance in that direction to find Ivy.

My shock must be apparent because she smiles sadly before looking ahead, and I don't miss how her eyes instantly seek out the king. I grip her fingers, giving them a squeeze. She's missed

so much, and I have so much to tell her, but for now, it'll have to wait.

The king is standing at the front where I see thirteen fresh graves dug. He's staring off vacantly toward the path leading to the surrounding forest. I feel Ivy's arm brush up against mine, and I can tell she's trying to figure out what's going on.

Time seems to stop, and the only noise is the soft breeze and the birds in the trees. I swallow when I see the open graves that have been freshly dug. Glancing around, we see movement in the far corner before a succession of coffins is carried to the grave sites where the king is standing.

Most of the coffins belong to children, making me think of Tyson. What if he's one of the children? What if Mrs. Daley killed him? It makes my heart clench in my chest. Most of them aren't large enough to be adults. Four of them, I can tell, are adult-sized coffins, but the other nine belong to children.

The guards carrying them stop by a grave, and they set them down before music starts playing from the violinist who stands by the river. It's complete silence while we all wait for the coffins to be lowered into each grave. Nobody speaks or even whispers. We merely watch.

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 to go back to work. The place is packed with people, but I only pay attention to the most important person to me here, Ivy. I grab Ivy's arm and tug her up the hill, back toward the castle. Excitement bubbles within me as I try to contain my enthusiasm about having her back in a semi-normal state.

This place was lonely when I was the only werewolf in the castle besides her. Not that she's shifted yet, but now she's returned to me; I feel like I can finally breathe again. Finally, I can let go of the pressure building on my shoulders because with her it's a little bit lighter, and I'll endure it for her, knowing she's by my side. We go back in through the laundry, following behind Clarice. The moment Ivy steps inside, I wrap my arms around her and so does Clarice.

"You're back?" I murmur while squeezing her tighter. Clarice cups her face in her hands, her eyes teary, and she lets out a breath that could not be mistaken for anything other than relief. Ivy grips her hands and opens her mouth to say something when the king suddenly enters the room. She stops, staring over her shoulder at him, and I notice Gannon step in behind him.

"Get back to work!" the king snaps at us before stalking past without so much as a backward glance. I press my lips in a line

when I see the heartbreak on her face. Is the mate bond not the same for Lycans? How could he treat her so badly?

I swallow and look away as Gannon and Damian follow after him. Gannon doesn't even look in my direction, just clenches his jaw as if he can't bear to be near me. I bite the inside of my lip before returning my attention to Ivy.

"He will come around," Clarice tells her, gripping her shoulders. Ivy shakes her head and looks at me. I smile at her sadly, and I hate how she put on her old maid's uniform. She's supposed to be happy! Happy because the king is her mate, but here she is, forced back into a position I wished I had never needed to see her in again. She ignores Clarice's protests that she isn't a servant and shouldn't help me when Ivy insists.

"I want to help Abbie. I am not his mate anymore. He has made that perfectly clear," Ivy tells her.

"You'll always be my queen," Clarice whispers, and I see Ivy swallow. Seeing her sadness just makes the decision to leave with Kade all the more torturous. I can't leave her with the king while I run off with my mate. Ivy follows me to help me do my chores, which I am excited about. It's the most time we've really spent together since being here.

I tell her about how the king returned yesterday morning and spent the day hand digging the graves himself and half the night, refusing any help when the guards tried to step in and take over. I also tell her about the castle gossip. However, I'm too scared to tell her I found my mate and may be leaving her. Yet as the day goes on and the time to meet Kade draws closer, I'm becoming more excited. That giddy, excited feeling bubbles in me at knowing I'm seeing my mate soon. Only for it to dampen when the guilt returns. It's like waves of pure happiness, then guilt over Ivy and Gannon, then fear of the unknown and excitement that I've found my mate, blissfully painful, a torturous combination.

But when the time comes, I can't help the spring I have in my step as we come into the kitchen. Clarice sighs and looks over at me, 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. A little excited squeal escapes me before I grab Ivy, quickly pecking her cheek, before rushing off out of the kitchen.

"Wait, where are you going?" Ivy calls after me. However, I don't stop. All day I've been trying to figure out a solution to my problems, one being that I can't leave Ivy, the other Tyson. I have to ask if there's any chance Kade would help me get him from Mrs. Daley. The other thing I have to ask is if he would

allow Ivy to come with me, because if she can't come, I'm not leaving her behind by herself.

Kade is waiting for me out front by the gates. He smiles when I slip out the doors, and I return the smile as I meet him. He holds my door open, and I don't hesitate to climb in, loving his scent that I know saturates his car. Kade takes me to a different place today. Instead of a cafe or restaurant, he takes me for a picnic by the bridge.

"Are you excited about leaving in a few days?" he asks as we set out the blanket and sit on it. I frown and look at the river running under the bridge.

"I have to leave, Abbie. I can't stay here. I have a pack to run back home," he tells me when I say nothing. He passes me a sandwich and pulls some grapes out of a container. He pops one in his mouth, watching me.

"What's wrong?" he asks, watching me. "Is it that Gannon you always talk about?" he demands, and I'm shocked to hear the anger in his tone.

I say nothing, scared to anger him further.

“Sorry. I hate how close you are. And I hate the way he stares at you,” Kade says.

“I’ve hardly seen him,” I tell him.

“He was watching you when you ran out to the car,” he tells me while taking a bite of his sandwich. I swallow, tearing apart my sandwich and popping a piece into my mouth.

“Do you know Ivy? My friend?” I ask him, and he glances at me.

“The king’s mate?” he asks.

I nod.

“Yeah, I’ve heard of her. Why?”

“The king hasn’t been nice to her recently. I wanted to know if she could come with us,” I ask, and Kade scoffs.

“And how would that be possible?” he laughs, and my face falls. I sigh, leaning up against the tree.

“I can’t steal the king’s mate, he would kill me, Abbie.”

“And I won’t go without her,” I tell him, and his eyebrows raise.

“You would choose your friend over me?” he asks.

“She’s more than just my friend. We grew up together,” I tell him, but he shakes his head.

“You’re asking the impossible of me.”

“We could sneak her out. The king doesn’t even need to know. He will think she ran away,” I try to reason.

“I can’t believe you are serious about this. I knew you were simple, but damn it, Abbie, the king is a Lycan. Do you have any idea what they are capable of?” he says, a sharp edge in his tone.

He’s right. I’m being foolish. It’s a stupid idea. I look away, embarrassed, and blink back tears.

“I didn’t mean to call you simple. Sometimes I forget it’s not your fault,” Kade says, reaching over and gripping my hand.

“I can’t read, but that doesn’t mean I am simple,” I respond to Kade, feeling the sting of his words more than he probably realizes. He’s the last person I expect to use such names against me.

“I don’t mean it the way it came out. I’ll think about your friend. Maybe we can figure something out. Now, what’s this other thing you mention in the car you want to ask me?” Kade squeezes my fingers, trying to smooth over his earlier comment.

I explain to him about Tyson, watching as he listens intently, nodding. “I know Alpha Brock. I can request the boy for you, if you want. See what he says,” he offers.

“Really?” I ask, excitement bubbling up. He’s willing to help me get Tyson back?

“Only if you behave. And show me that you can look after him when we get back home,” he conditions. The way he says ‘behave’ strikes me as odd, as though I am a child, too. I’m not quite sure what he means by it.

But he's willing to help me with Tyson. I could keep him and raise him, give him the safe refuge I have found. Now, all I need to do is convince Kade to let me sneak Ivy out. I can't wait to tell her that we might have a way to be free from this place.