

Chapter 22

Ivy

Abbie hasn't returned, and I wake up cold and shivering. I know the room isn't cold, but I am bundled beneath the blankets. So, I wonder why I am awake at such a ghastly hour and this freezing. Tossing the blankets back, I get up.

It is still dark outside, and I can't think of any reason why Abbie isn't back. Deciding to see if she fell asleep in the servant's rooms downstairs, I stretch and yawn; rubbing my arms, trying to warm them, and grip the door handle. Only when I twist it, I feel the weight against it, and it flies toward me.

I jump back to see the king suddenly sprawled on the floor. His eyes fly open, and he growls, lurching forward before freezing as he turns, spotting me.

I take a step back, wondering why he was leaning against the door or why he is down here in the first place. Was he here looking for Abbie, and if he was, what for?

My stomach sinks with the possibilities, and before I can stop it, a whimper slips past my lips. The king stands abruptly and scrubs his hand down his face before looking out into the hall and back at me.

A wave of fear crashes over me, and a desperate whimper escapes my lips, betraying my terror. The king's face hardens as he stands abruptly, the muscles in his jaw twitching with barely contained anger.

"Where is Damian?" he growls, his eyes darting around the hall before settling back on me. Trembling, I point to a door across from Abbie's room. Without another word, he storms toward it.

"Were you sleeping?" I blurt out, trying to break the tense silence. He pauses for a moment, his hand hovering over the doorknob before answering.

"That is none of your concern. Stay on your side of the castle," he barks before wrenching open Damian's door. My heart pounds as I realize I've angered him again.

"I-I was just looking for Abbie," I stammer, backing away and retreating back to my room.

“Ivy.”

I freeze, too scared to turn and face him. He strides over to me and drapes his jacket over my shoulders, tugging it closed with rough hands. His piercing gaze bores into mine and I can't look away.

“Go back to your room,” he orders gruffly before stepping back. Confused and shaken by his sudden change in behavior, I quickly leave the room and retreat to my own. Unable to shake off the feeling of unease from our encounter, I search for Abbie, but she is nowhere to be found in the servants' quarters.

There is no sign of her in the bathrooms, either. I even ask some guards, but they shake their heads, so I go back to my enormous, empty room. Pushing the door open, I shiver at how cold it is. The fire has gone out, so I flick a light on before wandering around and looking for matches and some kindling.

My hands shake as I try to light the match before using it to light the crumpled-up pieces of paper, which burn out before the wood can catch. With a sigh, I go to see if I can find a guard and ask them to light it for me because I am having no luck getting it to catch.

Stepping out of the room, I navigate my way back through the halls and walk toward the stairs. Only when I turn onto them, I see the king walking toward me.

“Why aren’t you in your room? Were you trying to leave?” he snarls, and his eyes flicker black. I gasp at the sight and take a step back from him while shaking my head, wondering why he is mad all of a sudden. I did nothing, yet once again earned his anger.

“Then why are you out of your room, Ivy?” he asks, stalking up the last of the steps toward me.

“The fire went out. It’s cold. I was hoping to find Dustin or a guard,” I admit. He sighs before looking toward his quarters.

“I’ll send someone. Go back to your room,” he says, stalking off down the hall toward his room. I watch him leave, only he stops at his bedroom door and looks back at me. He growls and I scurry off back toward my room before slipping inside. Nobody comes. I climb into bed, dragging the extra linens over me. I do not know how long I have been asleep when I hear a noise and sit up. Light flickers in the room, and I look toward the fire that has been ignited, only to see someone crouched in front of it loading logs into it.

Getting up, I drag my duvet with me, only to stop by the couch when I notice it is the king in front of the fireplace. His back tenses. He looks over his shoulder at me and then turns to glare at the fireplace and its flickering flames. I wait for him to leave, but he doesn't, so I crawl onto the couch.

This side of the room is significantly warmer. I observe the king from where I sit. He says nothing, just loads the wood in, and then gets up and walks over to the armchair and sits in it, resting his head back and closing his eyes. Only now can I see the deep bruising under his eyes, like he hasn't slept in days. He looks dead on his feet. He growls again, and his eyes open, looking at me.

"Go to sleep," he says, closing his eyes again.

"You aren't going back to your room?" I ask.

"I can't sleep," he says simply.

I want to ask him why, yet his eyes open again to peer over at me.

“The bond keeps me awake,” he says, clearly unhappy about it. I bite the inside of my lip and nod before laying back down, snuggling under my blanket, enjoying the warmth and his soothing scent.

It isn't until he starts snoring lightly that my eyes open to look over at him. Getting up, I sniff my blanket, which is drenched in my scent.

The bond tugs at me to comfort him, but I also don't want to wake him and have him get cranky at me. So instead, I drape my blanket over him before laying in front of the fire only for his snoring to change to purring, and I glance up to find him hugging the blanket, burying his face in it.

The following day I wake in my bed, my duvet chucked over me, and I peer around the room. There is no sign of the king, and if it wasn't for his scent tainting the blanket, I would have thought I imagined it.

All day, I search for Abbie before finally giving up. Gannon is also missing, and I am beginning to worry, but when I am sitting in my room bored out of my mind, the door bursts open. Abbie rushes into the room excitedly and runs over to me, where I sit in front of the fireplace.

Relief floods me. “Where have you been? I have been looking for you,” I ask before grabbing her. She is beaming with happiness and hugs me back before holding me at arm’s length.

“I didn’t want to upset you, but I have some news. I found my mate,” she gushes, almost bouncing on the spot. Her face is flushed, her hair frazzled with excited energy.

“Oh, that’s wonderful, Abbie. What’s he like?” I ask her.

She blushes and then starts gushing excitedly, telling me all about her new mate. I am happy for her until she turns a little nervous, which in turn makes me nervous, and she looks down at her hands.

“He’s great, but he asked me to leave with him. I just need to get permission from the king.”

“You’re leaving?” I feel my heart sink through my chest. This can’t be happening.

She nods sadly. “Yes, in a few days, but I have a plan. Come with me?” she asks, clutching my hands. I only look at the floor, knowing what the answer will be.

“I will convince him. He will help me get you out. We can come up with a meeting spot,” Abbie says.

“Abbie, he won’t go against the king,” I tell her.

She shakes her head. “I will convince him. You’ll see. He will let me bring you.” I chew my lip nervously, hoping she is right. I don’t want to be here without Abbie.