

## Chapter 34

Ivy

“The children you buried the other week?”

He nods before dropping his chin on my shoulder. “Correct, the rest were women not much older than you,” he adds.

“Who would do such a thing?” I murmur, staring back at the women.

“Some very sick individuals, unfortunately, the hunters have help from one of the packs. We have found a few of the rebel insignia patches too along with the bodies,” he says, reaching over to the drawer beside him and pulling out a sandwich bag full of fabric patches. He drops it on the desk, and I pick it up. The moment I turn it over, I gasp and clutch my ears as screams suddenly fill them.

Before I know what's happening, I find myself submerged in the deafening noise of the new surroundings as I struggle to take it in. The fear that courses through me makes my stomach sink and I feel cold all over. At the forefront of my mind, I am suddenly immersed in a memory arising from a time I wish to stay forgotten. The sound of gunfire can be heard resounding in the air around me.

"It's ok, come on out, come to Mommy," my mother whispered. My mother's blood-encrusted hands reach for me. In my attempt to drown out the sound of gunshots, I try to hide in what appears to be a cupboard, my hands covering my ears. In a cleaner's uniform, my mother has a patch across her heart that is sewn into the uniform. Blood soils the front, and her skin is tainted in it.

"Come on, Ivy, I would like you to come to me," my mother says, and I don't want to go with her, for some reason. She scares me but reluctantly I place my hand in hers, and she pulls me out into the carnage. The memory fizzles and warps before I find myself breathing heavily, trying to get my bearings. She was one of them. She really did do the horrible things she was accused of.

"Ivy, what is it?" Kyson asks, clutching me tighter against him while I tug on my hair, needing the pain to make it stop, to ground me back to the present.

“Ivy, you’re scaring me. Speak to me,” Kyson says as I descend into a panic attack. My lungs refuse to work as I try to suck in a breath when I suddenly feel the calling sweep over me. His deep purr emanates from him, forcing me to relax against him, and I let out a shaky breath, pressing closer and seeking it out instead of fighting against it.

“What happened?” he murmurs, but I shake my head, not wanting to remember and make the details clearer.

“She really did it, didn’t she?” I whisper as tears blur my vision.

“Who?”

“My mother,” I choke out, and he growls, his arms growing tighter, and I can feel the tremble of his arms as he grips me. I can sense he’s trying to reign in his anger toward her and for me being hers.

“The patch triggered something?” he asks, unable to keep his anger from his voice, though his purring never stops, and I nod against his chest. He nods but says nothing instead, letting me calm down, his hand moving to rub my back soothingly.

“Come on, I will take you back to the room,” he whispers.

I shake my head, but Kyson presses the sharp points of his teeth against my shoulder. I shudder, but he seems to merely do it as if to tell me he is still there like I have somehow forgotten he is holding me.

“I will see if Gannon or Damian will take you for a walk then I have work to do. So, I can’t right now,” he whispers into my hair. “If they’re busy; I will get someone to grab a pillow and blanket. You can rest on the couch until I’m done.”

I chew my lip, suddenly embarrassed over my breakdown. I am meant to be avoiding the bond, not seeking it.

The window calls to me longingly, and I’m desperate to go outside. This room now feels stuffy and closed in. “I won’t run,” I whisper before looking back at the king.

He watches me. “Ivy, I can’t...”

“How are you going to trust me if you don’t let me earn it?” I ask, and he pulls his lip between his teeth before pinching the bridge of his nose and sighing loudly.

“I will check in with Clarice every hour, I promise,” I plead. He growls, not liking my idea, and I move to climb off him knowing he’s going to refuse me when he pulls me back down, his hand grips my chin forcing my gaze to meet his.

“You’ll check in every half an hour and if you are so much as a minute late. I will send the entire castle out to hunt you down,” he warns, and excitement bubbles up within me at the thought of even a moment of freedom. He’s letting me leave the room. I nod and move to climb off him when he once again holds me in place.

“I let you go by yourself. You will sleep in the bed with me?” he states, tilting my chin to the side and watching me. My guess is that he is trying to see if I am trying to deceive him.

“Promise me, I need sleep, and I can’t with you sleeping on the goddamn couch,” he says, and I pull away from him.

“I need an answer, Ivy, or you don’t go,” he says, waiting expectantly. I sigh, but I really want to get out of this room. Without him breathing down my neck, I need to breathe for a few minutes but most of all, I want to feel free, even if it is only momentarily, so I nod and agree to his request.

“Words, Ivy. I want to hear you say it,” he tells me.

“I promise,” I whisper, and he drags me closer, hugging me tightly like he is worried it will be the last time he sees me. His lips press to my temple, and he sighs, letting me go.

“Then you can go; I will come to find you when I’m done here,” he says, and I get up off his lap. “And Ivy.” I stop staring back at him.

“Make sure you check in with Clarice.”

“Yes, every half hour,” I finish for him, and he nods, allowing me to leave. I quickly escape, and head downstairs. Stepping outside, I sigh a breath of relief. Today it is pretty warm, and the sun feels nice on my cold skin. Peering around, Clarice is hanging the last sheet on the clothesline, however, Peter is nowhere to be found.

“Where did Peter go?” I ask her, and she jumps from not hearing me come up behind her.

“Gosh, My Queen, you gave me a fright,” she says, clutching her hand that holds two pegs to her chest.

“Sorry, is Peter around?” I ask.

“Down at the graveyard. Where is the king?” she asks, glancing around nervously. The entire castle is aware I am in lockdown and under strict guard, so it must have her worried seeing me without someone.

“He let me out, but I have to check in with you every half hour,” I tell her with a growl, she nods and sighs.

“Right, well, Peter is busy. Although, I’m sure he would love the company. Little shit tried to rope me into helping him,” she chuckles. I nod, making my way down to the graveyard.