

Chapter 35

Ivy

It takes me a good few minutes to spot Peter kneeling behind a huge headstone. Wandering over to him, he peers up when my shadow is cast over him.

“Ivy, I mean, My Queen,” he says, baring his neck to me.

“Ivy is fine,” I tell him, and he lets out a breath.

“So can I help you with something?” he asks. I shrug, staring down at what he is doing. He is scrubbing and cleaning the headstones and removing the dead flowers.

“Want some help?” I ask.

He chews his lip before peering over the headstone and glancing at the castle. “Are you allowed?” he whispers, and I peer back over at the castle.

“Yes, I don’t see why not,” I shrug.

“Well, I am nearly done with this row. If you grab another bucket and brush, you’ll also need a polishing rag,” he says, showing me his tucked into his belt. Nodding, I turn and stride back toward the castle.

“In the laundry room, Ivy,” he calls, and I nod, going in search of the cleaning supplies.

Retrieving what I need, I earn a few strange stares from those working in the laundry, but they say nothing or question me as I slip back out with everything. I make my way back to Peter, who is in the next row. He stands up, coming closer to me.

“Where do you want me?” I ask him, and he looks around.

“Um, well, you could start in the middle. Those are pretty old though and require more scrubbing, or there is the servant’s cemetery over there,” he says, pointing closest to the forest and castle. “Or the hunters and rebels’ victims are the ones nearest the river.”

“Hunters and rebels’ victims?”

“Yes, most of those killed by rebel leaders Marissa and Darclay. Marissa was a rogue werewolf; she killed the king’s sister and that um, the royal family, they live, yeah I don’t know hours out that-away,” he says, pointing toward the forest. “Darclay, was the human head-hunter who recruited her,” Peter rambles on, yet I am still stuck at the mention of my mother’s name. Did Peter not know why the king kicked me out of the castle?

“How many are there?” I ask, gazing out at the spanning field of graves.

“From the hunters? Though most kills came from Marissa, she would pretend to be a servant and then kill everyone while they were sleeping. Most of those are from her, about 211 last time I counted,” he shrugs.

211! When I hear that all those lives have been lost, and my mother was behind it all, I become sick to my stomach. I have to steady myself to keep from fainting.

“Yep, she was the worst Lycan serial killer in history,” Peter says grimly.

“The king never got over it; he found his sister, and Marissa cut her unborn child out of her and mutilated him before stuffing him back in her womb. Well, that’s what I heard anyway from Trey; he is one of the guards,” he says, making me feel sick.

Peter then turns back to the grave he is cleaning and makes his way to the back. The first grave I come to belongs to a woman, kneeling, I set to work. When I finish hers, I move to the next and peer across the rows; the weight of what my mother did settles heavily on my shoulders.

I find it difficult to understand how the woman who raised and protected me could do such a thing to her own people. After turning back to the grave in front of me, I notice it has the same last name as the woman’s grave beside it. According to the birth and death date, it belonged to a child. Three months old; the child was barely given a chance to live. My heart breaks as I stare at the picture of the little angelic face on the headstone.

I have to accept the stark reality of my situation; I am the daughter of a serial killer. Bad blood runs through my veins. My hands are tainted by the blood of the woman who carried me. I scrub the grave with all my might, cleaning it before moving on to the next and next. With each one, the pit of my stomach becomes deeper. The skin on my fingers is bleeding from the wind, and my hands are chapped from it. It is impossible for me to stop. I have to undo what she did—remove

the taint she has marked on them. When I finish the row, I move on to the next and the next when feet stop beside me.

And I am caught off guard by a growl, and I forgot entirely that I hadn't checked in with Clarice. Peering around, I notice it is almost dark outside.

"My entire guard is out looking for you!" the king growls angrily. And I flinch at his words but don't stop, I need to clean them, need to fix what she did.

Kyson bends down, snatching the scrubbing brush from my hands. "Damn it, Ivy, look at your hands." Peering up at him, I snatch it back from him and turn back to the grave; if I can just clean them all, it will undo it. My mind is consumed with what she has done; I don't know what else to do, don't know how to take it back.

The king snatches the scrubbing brush and tosses it in the bucket. The water splashes outside the bucket and spills on me, and I see guards approaching.

"You didn't check in; Clarice is now in trouble for covering for you. Why are you out here? You disobeyed me," he snaps, bending down and gripping my arms. He shakes me.

Though, his actions don't affect me. Can't he see the blood on my hands? What she did? How it taints me, I need it off. I need to erase it, erase her. She doesn't deserve to be remembered, not after what she did. She was an imposter. The woman who raised me was a monster; I am the monster she gave life to.

"You're sunburnt; your skin is blistered," he hisses, trying to drag me toward the castle. I thrash, yanking out of his grip and staggering backward.

"Ivy!" he snaps, reaching for me as I grab the scrubbing brush. I can take it back; it will go away. I just need to clean them. His hand grips my arm, and the growl that leaves me makes him and everyone near me freeze.

"Ivy?" Kyson whispers, and I look up at him. How doesn't he see it? How can he stand looking at me when I am born of their blood shed?

"She killed them. I loved her, and she killed them. How could she love me and kill them?" I cry, my heart breaking at all the pain she has caused all these people. All the hurt from the years of torture made so much sense now. It was my punishment for being hers. Karma came back and took vengeance on Abbie and me. Everything Abbie and I endured is because of what she did,

because I am a monster created by a serial killer, and because I loved her when she didn't deserve love. I loved a monster, and I called her mom.