

Chapter 37

Kyson

Ivy continues trying to help, but each time I just tuck her closer until, eventually, she gives up. Instead, she presses against my chest, listening to my calling for her and only moving when I pick her up and move to the next gravestone. No one leaves until the last grave is cleaned. Only then does Ivy let me scoop her up in my arms and head back to the castle.

Climbing up the small hill, Clarice catches up to me. “I will make her something to eat,” Clarice whispers as we walk up the hill through the graveyard. I nod to her and listen to Ivy hum the song that seems to comfort her. Over the last few days, I have heard her singing it or humming. She knows it word for word; she never gets a word wrong. The Kingdom’s Anthem. I place her in her bedroom, telling Dustin to keep watch over her as I head across the castle to my old quarters.

I enter the room meant for the Princess Azalea. My sister worked so hard to set it up in the hopes we would find the

missing girl. But we never did. She, like my sister and so many others, has long been dead.

Moving to the dresser, I pick up the silver jewelry box and open it. Removing the bracelet inside, I set it on the dresser before taking the small box back to the room, winding it up so Ivy can hear the song being played. Her song, the one she knows by heart. I wonder, briefly, if they used to play this to her at the orphanage.

When I come into the room, I see her sitting huddled by the fire, shivering despite her skin being burned. I sit behind her, pulling her against me, placing the box in her hands, and opening the lid. The music starts, and she gazes up at me, her brows furrowing before recognizing the tempo matched the song she sang.

“Where did you get this?” she asks, peering inside the box.

“Azalea’s room,” I answer, and she gasps, trying to pass it back, and I shake my head. “Have it, it’s for you.”

“No, no, take it,” she says, placing it in my lap before standing and rushing off. I sigh, rubbing a hand down my face and

quickly setting the box on the bookcase and going in search of her.

“Why would you give me that?” she sobs when I find her huddled under the clothes she had made a den out of.

“Because you like the song, and Azalea won’t use it,” I tell her, trying not to smile at her makeshift den. Knowing it is the werewolf side appearing suddenly, she frantically tries to place the clothes in order. Completely unaware, she continues building her den and has instinctively snuggled down inside it.

“You need a bath,” I tell her while reaching for her, but she growls at me. Mumbling to herself and rearranging the clothes, she starts ripping more off the hangers.

“Bath now, then you can make your den on the bed; I am not sleeping on the floor,” I tell her, and she stops, staring at her hands and then looks around herself.

“I wasn’t, I was...”

I can feel her confusion at her actions.

“You are, now come,” I tell her, and she stares at the clothes she is shredding to pieces before blushing, having not realized. I know she deliberately fights her urges, and I swear she sometimes forgets I can feel her.

“Bath, then bed. Now come or do I need to make you?”

She seems confused, and I groan, grabbing her. Ivy snarls at me for removing her from her little sanctuary, biting into my arm and making me chuckle.

My laughter only enrages her as she bites me more brutally on the chest which makes me hiss at the sting. Her actions only amuse me, knowing she is acting on instinct and not on her conscious mind. She mauls me, her instincts taking over and eventually I gently pry Ivy’s teeth from my arm, wincing at the pain. Blood trickles down my skin, staining my abs.

Ivy’s eyes widen with panic as she realizes what she has done, her hands trembling as they reach out to touch the wound. I can see the struggle within her, the battle between her human self and the wild instincts of her wolf.

“Shh, it’s alright,” I say gently, cradling Ivy in my arms.

“I’m sorry,” she whispers hoarsely, tears streaming down her face. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

I stroke her cheek, my thumb wiping away her tears. “I know you don’t, Ivy.” Panic and fear wash through the bond and I know she is worried about me punishing her.

“Deep breaths,” I instruct softly, mirroring my words by taking slow, deliberate breaths myself. “In... and out.”

We sit there together for what feels like an eternity, our breathing gradually synchronizing. The quietness of the room envelops us, broken only by the occasional snuffle from Ivy.

I manage to guide her toward the bathroom, careful not to exert too much force. I fill the bathtub, adjusting the temperature to a soothing warmth. Ivy hesitates at the edge of the tub, her gaze fixed on the water as if it holds some hidden danger.

She won’t let me bathe with her, so instead, I shower, watching her while she bathes. By the time she gets out, I can smell the food Clarice has placed in the room. We dress quickly, and I have to lock the closet door to stop her from going back in there. “No, you promised me,” I remind her, and she mutters something before she reluctantly climbs into bed.

Grabbing the tray, I set it between us though I am surprised when she picks up the raw meat, which I know Clarice had made for me, seeing as I am Lycan, and we prefer our meat raw. We can eat all sorts of foods, nothing off limits, but primarily I prefer raw meat. Lycans are carnivorous. We have adapted over time, but some things always remain the same. Instinct isn't entirely gone despite the modern times.

However, I have never seen Ivy pick up raw meat. I watch her, finding it rather disturbing to see a werewolf eat it as they are part human. Lycans are more animal than person, and there was a time when we never used our human forms. It is only with the change in era and modern-day technology and the human hysteria that we find ourselves more inclined to our human-looking side. At some point, it became safer and easier to blend in. Eventually and fortunately for us, humans forgot our existence and we became a mere myth.

So to see Ivy eating raw meat disturbs me, although I don't try to stop her. She is acting out of sorts though, making me wonder if the calling has had some strange effect on her, putting some of my Lycan traits onto her. Nevertheless, I say nothing, just glad she is actually eating. Now I just have to wait for her to fall asleep to heal her a bit. She won't let me touch her more than slight brushes or when I manage to force her to accept my

touch. However, I figure it best not to push my luck with her odd behavior and the meltdown earlier.

When Clarice knocks on the door, I grab the now-empty tray and carry it over to the door, opening the door, and giving it to her.

“Hungry, My King?” Clarice asks, and I peer back at Ivy, who is attacking my pillow like it is a threat in her sleep.

“No, Ivy was,” I tell her, and she seems taken aback, pulling a funny face before looking in the door toward the bed.

“Maybe she is going into heat?” she asks, though I can tell even she isn’t sure.

“I thought...?” Clarice doesn’t finish and shakes her head. “Right, I will leave you to it. It has to be the heat, only thing that makes sense,” she murmurs, wandering off and muttering to herself.

Shutting the door, I come back over to the bed and climb in, thinking to myself. She has had no appetite for days. But at the prospect of raw meat, it seems she can’t get enough.

I furrow my brows as I glance down at her tucked into my side. If she is going into heat, what does that mean for both of us when she won't let me touch her, and does that mean she will soon shift? The heat isn't just agony for a she-wolf, but with me being Lycan, I will go into it with her, which I have heard is just as painful. Lycan males react to pheromones, and it is maddening when we smell a heat ravaged female, but since she is my mate, it will be pure agony for me just like her until I knot her and if I don't, it can become dangerous, the mate bond could turn lethal when she is in heat.

With so many thoughts running through my head, I struggle to sleep. Eventually, I am sucked into the oblivion of rest only to wake up to realize Ivy has shut the alarm off. Squinting at the brightness in the room, it must be late in the morning, and I sit up in a panic looking for her.

"Ivy?" I sing out, tossing the blanket back and heading for the bathroom. She isn't in there and I rip open the closet checking her den. Also not there.

She isn't in the room. With a growl, I search all the adjacent rooms before leaving it entirely, furious that she left it without telling me.

“Where is Ivy?” I ask the guard by the doors leading out.

“I haven’t seen her, My King; I thought she was in her room with you; I only just came on shift,” he answers.

I shake my head. How had she managed to slip past the guards once again?

“Find her,” I snarl, and everyone in the corridors scatters taking off in search of her. I push out the front doors spotting Peter.

“Peter!” I call, seeing him come toward me up the path from the stables. He glances at me before looking away at my state of undress; I had my sleep shorts on, yet my chest is bare.

“Where is Ivy?” I demand and he turns pointing back the way he came.

“She’s helping me in the stables,” he says, and I growl, which makes him run off as I stalk toward the path fuming when panic rushes through the bond, and I start running.