

Chapter 4

Ivy

After everyone leaves, I'm left alone inside the stables. My stomach sinks somewhere deep. And without Abbie here to take my mind away from this life of mine that always seems to fall on me in tatters. I feel nothing but grief. I grieve the happiness I felt momentarily, only to lose it just as quickly as I found it.

Peering around, I notice this place feels lonelier than the orphanage, lonelier than when I first came here, and was petrified about spending my first night away without Abbie. Rubbing my arms, a cold settles into my bones, and I pick at the cupcake that was brought down for me. I stare at the frosting, trying to imagine what the cake would have looked like. Yet, doing that saddens me further, and I lose my appetite to finish it.

Instead, I drag a bale of hay from one of the stalls when I hear the stable doors open. "What are you doing?" Dustin asks me, quickly rushing over to help me. "Where do you want it?"

I point to the small fire, and he grabs it, placing it close but not too close that it risks catching on fire. He steps aside, waiting for me to sit, but when I don't, he watches me as I try to break the thick strings holding it together. He sighs heavily, leaning over me, and using his claws, he slices it. The strings fall away, and I grab a handful, spreading it out on the floor to try to make a bed.

"This is some bullshit," Dustin mutters, and I wonder if I am about to get in trouble for ruining the bale that is obviously for the horses when he growls, shrugging off his jacket and his shirt.

"What are you doing?" I ask him when he grabs one of the horse blankets from the wall, too. He lays the blanket on top of the hay before rolling his shirt into a pillow for me. He then holds his jacket open for me. I step closer, and he slides it up one arm before I slip my other into the other hole.

"Unfortunately, I don't smell like the king. But it will keep you a little warmer," he tells me.

"Now, I need to find another shirt, despite the king sending you here. He won't be pleased to learn I am walking around barely clothed in front of you." He smiles at me sadly before turning.

“I will bring you back a blanket,” he says before strolling toward the doors and leaving. A few moments after he leaves, Gannon enters, also stripping his jacket and shirt off, and giving them to me. He nods once at me.

“Dustin will bring me another,” he tells me when I try to hand it back, already having Dustin’s.

“Thank you,” I tell him and he leaves, shutting the door behind him.

Sinking down on my makeshift bed, I try to get comfortable while waiting to shift. One part of me is curious about what my wolf form will look like, while another part of me fears the pain of my first shift.

Yet as the night goes on, the flames in the fire flicker, I feel myself becoming increasingly restless, my bones ache, my ass has gone numb from the hard floor. Despite the hay, it does nothing more than give a little cushioning.

Despite the pain in my body, every part of me is yearning for Kyson, yearning for his touch, his scent through the bond. I sniff Dustin’s shirt, but it offers nothing more than a little

warmth. My legs, arms, and even my scalp all ache. How did Abbie endure this torment before shifting, or is it merely the bond? Getting up and stumbling toward the window, I see the moon is high in the sky already.

Shouldn't I have shifted by now? The door opens and I see it's Gannon checking on me. He cautiously steps into the stables, peering in all the stalls before spotting me in the far one looking out the window.

He lets out a breath, worry crossing his features. "You sounded like you were in pain," he tells me, and my brows furrow. "You haven't shifted yet?" he seems just as confused.

"Apparently, I'm a dud in that department, too," I tell him, and he swallows thickly.

"You're not a dud, Ivy. The king will come to his senses. Just come away from the window. You're shivering," he tells me, and I glance down to see my skin laced in goosebumps. "There is still time for you to shift," he tells me, glancing at his watch.

Gannon leads me back to the fire. When I sit back down in my straw bed, Gannon stokes the fire. "I will grab you some more wood," he tells me.

“He promised,” I whisper, thinking of when he said I wouldn’t have to do this alone. Gannon stops, and I don’t think he heard me when he turns to face me. He looks like he wants to say something but then closes his mouth.

“I didn’t think he’d break a promise, but he’s just like everyone else. I am still Ivy, the rogue girl. You. No one, I liked being someone,” I tell myself more than him.

“You’re still my queen,” Gannon tells me, and I look at him sadly and smile.

“No, I am the daughter of the woman who kills queens,” I say, reminding him of how unworthy I am. He presses his lips in a line and glances away.

“You’re not your mother.”

“He doesn’t seem to think so. Maybe this is payback for what she did? I’m her punishment, but the goddess didn’t need to punish Abbie alongside me all these years,” I tell him.

“The king will come to his senses. The guard won’t allow you to remain down here forever. It will drive us mad,” Gannon says.

“Why would you betray your king for a lowly rogue?” I chuckle.

“You stopped being rogue the day the king laid eyes on you. From that moment on, you became our queen. You just didn’t know it. As your guard, I promise I will not let you rot here forever. Give him a few days to calm down; I am happy to remain with you,” he tells me.

“And if he doesn’t come to his senses?”

“Then the guard will challenge him for you,” he says without further explanation. He then leaves to collect more wood.

As I sit here in the flickering light of the fire, my body continues to ache, and my mind races. I can’t help but wonder where Kyson is, and what he’s doing. Is he worried about me?

Suddenly, a sharp pain shoots through my body, and I let out a low growl as I feel my bones begin to shift and change. It’s unlike anything I’ve ever felt before, and for a moment, I fear

that something has gone wrong. But then the pain begins to subside, only to return with a vengeance, but no matter how many times the agony rolls through me, I don't shift.