

Chapter 43

Kyson

I feel somewhat sick knowing Ivy isn't beside me where I can touch her and feel her warmth. So I resolve to stalk through the halls searching for Gannon, who oddly isn't answering the mind link. Every cell in my body calls out to her, telling me to go back to my mate and covet her away from the rest of the world. However, I have to remember Ivy doesn't want that. At least not yet. I'm not even sure she wants me in any capacity, not after the heartache I caused her. One thing is becoming more evident to me, though. Her instincts are growing stronger, and I know she will soon shift. It is inevitable, and I am just waiting for it to happen.

'Where are you?' Damian rushes through the mind link, making me halt my steps in the middle of the corridor.

'Looking for Gannon, I need to speak to him about Abbie,' I tell him, jogging down the steps toward his room.

‘He’s with me. Come to the office; it’s important,’” Damian says, cutting off the link abruptly.

I growl, turning on my heel and stalking toward the front of the castle to my office. Pushing it open, I see a messy scene before me. Damian has boxes of files scattered all over the floor. Dustin is also rummaging through paperwork, and I spot Gannon passed out drunk in a chair by the window. The smell of liquor hangs heavily in the air, and it is so unlike Gannon to get himself into this sort of state. Clicking my tongue, I turn my attention to Damian and Dustin just as Dustin hands Damian what appears to be a picture.

“Here’s another one.”

“How the fuck did we not figure this out?” Damian mutters under his breath. He suddenly runs his arm over my desk, swiping everything off it, and it crashes to the floor as he and Dustin start setting out documents and pictures.

“Marissa isn’t her mother; you were right,” Damian says, a grave expression on his face.

Concerned and confused, I walk to the table. What have they gotten themselves into now? I wonder. Is this an elaborate ruse to get me to go easier on Ivy?

“The man pretending to be Ivy’s father, Jason Clenton, was King Garret and Queen Tatiana’s gardener. Marissa was a staff member inside the castle, but everyone assumed she was a cleaner or cook. We could never find any documentation of what position she applied for,” Damian says, his eyes manic, while sliding a document over to me.

“Okay, but did you find anything on Azalea?” I ask him, still unsure what to make of this situation.

“That’s just it. Azalea never existed in any files: we don’t even have her birth certificate, but we have this,” Dustin says, handing me an application form for a job. I glance over it, noting Jason’s name on top of the document.

“For a gardener position?” I ask, shaking my head, wondering what this was supposed to mean.

“Look in the notes, down the bottom and the date. We were so busy looking at Marissa’s files, we never thought to check anyone else’s, assuming they were killed when she opened the

gates for the hunters. My eyes scan over the document to see some handwritten notes by the king and queen.

The applicant has a partner wishing to apply for a nanny position. It then lists Marissa's name and her mobile number. It's dated three days after Azalea was born. Dustin hands me another document, which I recognize as our old staff application. Inside are her identity documents, a criminal history which appears squeaky clean, but down the bottom was a part saying: Applicant admits she has a seven-year-old child and can't work weekends as her babysitter works on Saturdays and Sundays. I glance at her records, catching note of the start date. So, she applied to work for our family years after Garret and Tatiana? My eyes peer up to Damian's and Dustin's. "Abbie's parents had to be watching the woman's daughter, right?" Damian nods.

"Azalea would have been seven when Marissa started working here. Nine, when my sister died, which wasn't long before Ivy ended up in the orphanage." I tell him, glancing back down at the paperwork.

"Yes, she worked for the king and queen for two years. Azalea would have been two when she went missing, which matches everything else; your sister was killed eight years later, making Azalea ten at the time. AND we found something else," says Damian, his eyes wide with madness.

He hands me an aged but elegant notebook. I'm annoyed. Can he just tell me what he's on about?

"Why are you giving me a book?" I ask.

"It's a diary," says Damian. "And it belonged to the queen."

"Where did you get this?" I ask him.

"When we visited the kingdom with Ivy, we found it in a shoebox in the shed. They were mainly working diaries with appointments, and that was stuffed down the bottom. Dustin and I found it today when we looked through the box."

"My eyes scan the page, and I gasp. A picture of a small child sitting on the queen's lap eating a strawberry from her mother's fingertips has been crammed between the pages. I see Marissa standing nearby in the background, watching them in her uniform. Those cold eyes send shivers up and down my spine. "That was taken two days before the attack; look at the date. More importantly, look at the name," Damian says.

Azalea Ivy-Rose Landeena, 4-years old.

The large office suddenly feels small and stuffy. My head grows warm as I grapple with it all. Could Ivy, the rogue girl from the orphanage, be Princess Azalea, the royal heir and my royal match who was taken as a baby? A girl who had been presumed dead for over a decade? I start to panic. Does this mean I damaged our bond, potentially permanently, over this mistake? How did I not put the pieces together?

“Ivy... is Azalea,” I mutter “Are you positive?” I ask, wanting to be 100% sure I have the right information. However, like a dark veil being lifted, everything starts to become crystal clear. So many things click into place... her instincts... her eyes. How could I be so stupid? I want to hit myself, hit something. We assumed she was a werewolf because that’s what Ivy thought she was, what she was listed in the orphanage, and what her kidnapper parents were.

“One way to be 100% positive, though I am positive, Ivy is Azalea. Check this out...” says Damian, pointing to the following line in the diary, which lists Azalea’s meal plan, her feed times, and routine. Along with identifying characteristics, height, weight measurements, as well as a birthmark. According to the diary, there was a strawberry-shaped birthmark on her inner left thigh along the crease at the apex of her legs. I furrow my brows, trying to remember if I noticed any mark on her there, but I wasn’t really paying attention when

I had my face down there, too busy enjoying the noise she made and the taste of her flesh.

“In the back of the diary were some things the queen listed, complaints she had warned to her husband about Marissa,” Dustin says, turning the diary over and upside down before opening the back page.

“Marissa was warned numerous times for calling Azalea Ivy instead of using her first name. She was also whipped three times on separate occasions when she was caught telling Azalea to call her mommy,” Dustin continues, pointing out the different notations made inside the diary.

“Ivy’s Lycan. She’s fucking royalty!” I murmur, horrified. Some part of me hopes that we’re wrong while longing to be right. On one hand, she would no longer be tied to that evil woman. On the other, things would get a whole hell of a lot more complicated.

“What have I done?” I whisper. Damian folds his arms, watching me before rubbing his chin. Dustin falls back in his chair and scrubs both hands down his face.

“We will work it out. She’ll forgive you,” Damian says, and I shake my head.

“I blamed her!” I roar, punching the desk. The wood creaks and groans, splitting down the middle whilst I try to rein control over myself.

“She’ll forgive you, Kyson. You aren’t the only one to blame. We all should have figured it out,” Damian says and Dustin nods, putting his head down.

“She is a Lycan. I could have killed her by tossing her aside, Damian. She could have fucking died! Lycan bonds are sacred, that explains why she never shifted. It explains so much and I could have killed her. Lycan’s need their bonds!” I yell at him.

“You didn’t know! You just need to get her to mark you, and it will be fine. Ivy being a Lycan, can go into heat any day now, Kyson, and she will mark you, which will reforge the bond completely. She won’t be able to help herself. You said it yourself, that the bond wasn’t completely severed for you, so it couldn’t have been for her either, you never outright rejected her, luckily! Only werewolves can reject their mates, us doing so can kill us or turn us savage! You can still fix this, My King. Once she marks you there is no way for her to break the bond,

not without hurting herself, anyway,” Damian says, trying to reason.

“Your words are making it worse, Damian. She would have been in agony. No wonder she fretted the way she did,” I say, dropping into my chair and placing my head in my hands.

“You can’t take back what you did, but you can make it up to her, Kyson,” he replies, but I don’t see how that would be possible.

“She barely lets me touch her!” I snap at him.

“She is acting on instinct mostly these last couple of days. It is only a matter of time before she shifts,” Damian says, and I sigh before peering up at him and shaking my head.

“If she doesn’t mark me beforehand, her shift will be excruciating since I put the stress on our bond. She would already be weakened,” I scoff, shaking my head at how badly I fucked everything up. Damian and Dustin say nothing, knowing I am right. What could they say other than I fucked up? Now I just have to hope she will forgive me for it. They tried to warn me. Everyone tried to warn me.

We are in the middle of packing everything up when a sudden realization strikes me as I glance at Dustin. “Wait, you should be with Ivy. She wanted to leave the room earlier,” I tell him, and his head snaps up.

“You could have told me, shit, she is probably wondering why I am not around,” Dustin says, getting to go in search of her. I shake my head.

“It’s fine; I can feel she is fine. She must still be in the room,” I breathe.

“I suppose I should go see if I can find this birthmark before I tell her, that is if she lets me touch her,” I huff before walking out of my office to go in search of her.