

Chapter 46

Kyson

I scramble to my feet, following Ivy into the bathroom. Her skin feels clammy as she ambles to the sink basin to rinse and brush her teeth. Leaning on the door frame, I watch her wet her face before wetting the back of her neck. She stops beside me when she goes to leave, and I step aside, letting her pass. By the time she gets back to the bed in front of the fireplace, her teeth are chattering once more. Goosebumps cover every inch of flesh as she huddles beneath the blanket.

As she rests, I can see her mind churning. I can feel it, feel her confusion yet also curiosity and fear of knowing the truth. Her pain writhes through the bond, the cramping, nausea. Seeing her struggle selfishly makes me glad I don't have to experience it myself again. It's just the initial shift, the body preparing itself. A Lycan's first shift always sticks with you; it is excruciating. Hers will be worse by my sabotaging of the bond.

“It makes no sense,” she murmurs, barely audible even to my ears. I roll on my side, peeling the blanket back. She is bundled up like a Lycan burrito.

“What doesn’t?” I ask her.

“If it were true, why would she take me? Why not kill me?”

“Unfortunately, not everything makes sense, Ivy, and I don’t think I want to make sense of that woman’s mind; if it made sense, we would be like her if we shared her mindset,” I answer.

Ivy sighs, and her big cerulean blue eyes peer up at me. “And if you’re wrong?”

“I’m not. I was the first time; I am sure this time, Ivy.”

“But if you are?”

“Then nothing, you’re still my mate, and you are not your mother,” I tell her. She snuggles down in the blanket, only her nose up peeking out from the blanket.

“My body heat will help regulate your temperature. The bond calls for it now. It recognizes me, Ivy. Don’t suffer just because I was a prick. You have me and the bond; use it. I won’t force you to do anything unless you ask me to,” I tell her.

“Why would I ask you to?” she says, like I am absurd.

“The calling, Ivy. I know you don’t like me using it, but there is a reason male Lycans are gifted with it.”

“Yeah, to rape women,” she says with a roll of her eyes. She is half correct. It is barbaric when viewed from that perspective, it gets a bad rap because of that.

“I would never rape you. Do you think that little of me?”

“I don’t think much of you when you use it to get what you want,” she says, and I sigh.

“It’s not used just for getting you to submit. It helps calm the bond. Calm your bond to me, Ivy. Yes, it can be used in a sense as an aphrodisiac or to calm you, which is my only intention to calm our bond, and to forge it as you go through this change,” I tell her.

She clicks her tongue, and her eyes flit away as she shudders and her teeth clatter.

“If you mark me, you would be able to feel me better. Once the bond is forged for Lycans, we can even get a sense of each other’s thoughts. It goes beyond just feeling each other’s emotions.”

“How so?” she asks.

“I can tell when you’re hurt, like your hand. For example, mine hurt, too. I can feel your curiosity to know if I am right about you being Azalea. Your apprehension at also knowing, I can tell I scare you,” I admit before swallowing.

“But I haven’t marked you?”

“No, but I have marked you. Once you mark me, there is nothing you would be able to hide from me, Ivy. I will feel and sense everything when it comes to you, but that goes both ways. You will also feel everything I feel.”

If she doesn't mark me, she'll certainly be in for a long night. However, I doubt my ability to convince her. "Marking me will strengthen you," I tell her in a last-ditch effort.

"I don't want strength, Kyson; I am sick of being strong. Sick of biting my tongue, sick of answering to someone, sick of the mold everyone puts me in. I'm tired. Strength? Strength isn't physical; it's enduring. Enduring everything when all you want to do is nothing but crumble and let it go; it becomes too heavy. Abbie and I were each other's strength, each fighting to hold on for the other; I don't need strength, Kyson. I need peace," she says with an exasperated sigh.

"More than my life?" I whisper to her, and she nods. I've always been curious about what it means to them.

"Yes, nothing means I love you more than my heart is still beating for you; we stopped living for ourselves. Instead, we lived for each other. You go, I go, so you keep fighting because you can't bear the thought of leaving the other behind," Ivy answers.

"Like a pact?"

"Yes. We made it when we were fifteen."

“What happened when you were fifteen?”

“Abbie went missing.,” Ivy says, glancing down at her fingers.

“One day, she didn’t come up from the cellar,” she whispers so softly I almost miss it. But I can hear the anguish in her voice making me wonder what was so bad in the cellar. What depravity did Mrs. Daley inflict on them to get this response from the bond?

“What’s in the cellar, Ivy,” I ask, not sure I truly want to know. The feeling through the bond alone is making me queasy.

“She was supposed to be cleaning the mop buckets, so I looked for her.” Ivy’s lips quiver, and she picks at the blanket wrapped around her.

“I found her in the cellar, her tunic torn, her thighs covered in blood. Abbie was standing on a chair with a rope around her neck. She wouldn’t tell me what happened, but I knew. I should have known when he went missing, too.” Ivy wipes a tear that slides down her cheek. “He hurt her, there... There was so much blood.”

I swallow thickly, a lump forming in my throat, terrified at the thought of two fifteen-year-old girls going through this.

“She was taking too long. Abbie told me to leave, but I grabbed the other chair and climbed up beside her and loosened the noose, wrapping it around my neck, too,” Ivy answers, her eyes getting a faraway expression like she’s trapped in some memory. The fear through the bond makes me clench my jaw. That pack still has so much to answer for.

“I told her ‘more than my life.’ Mine wasn’t worth living either if she wasn’t in it, that we would go together because her life was worth more than mine.”

“And she got down?” I ask, the calling slipping out at her distress, and she lifts her eyes to mine as it washes over her. “Helping?” I ask her, and she sighs but nods. “So obviously, she didn’t kill herself,” I continue, wanting to know what happened as much as it sickens me. It helps distract her from the fact she would be shifting any time now.

“No.”

She moves her hair behind her shoulder showing me the back of her neck and behind her ear. A white scar travels across her

neck and behind her ear. I had seen it before but never really paid much attention to it. I know she is self-conscious about the scars that lace her skin, and I just figured it was another inflicted by the whip.

“We both jumped, but the rope didn’t hold our weight,” Ivy says, and my stomach drops before Ivy fixes her hair, covering the scars back up.

“Abbie has a scar behind her left ear where the rope cut into her. Instead of death, we both got a headache when our heads collided,” Ivy chuckles.

How could she laugh at something so horrific, like it is nothing. The fact she can laugh speaks enough for what those two girls endured.

“And that’s how it started?” I ask. Ivy shrugs.

“Afterward, Mrs. Daley started calling for us to cook dinner. Abbie didn’t want to go up, so I helped clean her up. I swapped her tunic for mine, and we went to cook dinner,” Ivy says, pulling her face from the blanket so I can see her a little better.

“I got twelve lashes for that ruined tunic, but what it cost Abbie was worse. Mrs. Daley didn’t just give her scars that day, she broke her soul. So for Abbie, I wore it. Then we cooked dinner. Later that day, I saw Mrs. Daley get paid by the butcher who hurt Abbie.”

“The butcher?”

“He delivered meat to the orphanage,” says Ivy, shuddering and wiping a stray tear from her eye “After that, where Abbie went, I went, where I went, she went, more than my life. If she were to endure it, I would, too,” Ivy says.

I need to get Abbie away from Alpha Kade. The poor girl has endured enough. I now worry once she realizes he is married, it will truly destroy her. I now understand why the pair of them are so close. They are dependent on each other. I chew my lip; Mrs. Daley is lucky to be alive. She will never walk again after the lashes she received, yet that is even too kind. She won’t be left breathing when I send Gannon back for her and God help the butcher when Gannon learns his name.

Silence eventually falls over both of us. She doesn’t even fight against me using the calling. But as the night drags on and her pain gets worse, she moves closer before letting me under the blanket with her. Her legs kick as her pain intensifies, and I

wonder why it was taking forever. It isn't until the early morning hours that I struggle to handle seeing her like that as she rolls and turns over, trying to get comfortable.

“Ivy?” I call to her as she rolls over, moving closer to the fire. Her eyes blaze brightly like jewels, her pupils fully dilated with a silver hue through them. She groans, kicking off the blankets, her skin heating. I can tell she's nearly started shifting, recalling my own burning sensation I experienced during my shift.