

## Chapter 9

Ivy

“Ivy?” says Gannon, turning to grab me. But I quickly rush off the way we came in. I don’t want anyone getting hurt over me having a shower. It’s fine, I can wash in the lake. At least then, I won’t have to worry about him storming in and dragging me out by my hair.

“Ivy, wait,” Damian calls out behind me. I ignore him and rush out the doors before Kyson can witness how much he hurt me. As I’m trudging back down the path toward the stables, I hear Abbie call out to me. Peering over my shoulder, I see Abbie carrying a picnic basket.

“Hey, what’s happened?” she asks, taking in my tear -stricken face.

“Nothing, I’m fine. I just ran into Kyson is all,” I tell her, and she stops, staring up toward the castle where I see Kyson still arguing with Damian and Gannon.

“Come on, I have food. Are you hungry?” she asks and the moment she mentions eating, my belly rumbles. She chuckles, looping her arm through mine and leading me toward the pier that overlooks the lake.

Abbie sits with me on the pier that allows us to walk out across the man-made lake that is in front of the stables. She has brought me over here to have breakfast, though I have no appetite and can't bring myself to eat. Although we do find peace in the morning sun and enjoy the rays heating my cold skin. I can feel the cold all over, deep into my bones.

It is like I have never known warmth and won't again. The ache is horrible. Abbie tries to cheer me up. She tells me of everything that had happened in the castle last night. Though it mainly falls on deaf ears, my thoughts fixating on how Kyson glared at me in the corridor.

Apparently, she heard word from one guard that more children were found in riverbeds in neighboring towns. She also said all night, the castle was on edge and that the king had been insufferable. He even attacked two of the night guards. I stare longingly at the castle, knowing he is there. Despite him just casting me back out moments ago, I still long to be close to him. He is close, yet so far away, too. Pulling my gaze from the

castle and silencing my thoughts, Abbie moves closer to the edge of the pier, and I grip her arm.

“Abbie!” I hiss as she tosses her legs over the side and into the water.

“Gannon is right there,” she points him out, and I notice he has returned from arguing with Kyson, and I let her go with a sigh. I know he won’t let her drown, but fear still bubbles in me. Abbie continues dangling her feet over the edge. But I am not daring enough.

I can’t even see the bottom of the still lake. It must be quite deep. Her being so close to the edge makes my nauseous stomach worse. If she falls in, I would be of no use to her and would drown myself trying to save her. However, Abbie is right, and I know I am being foolish. Gannon won’t let her drown if she falls in. He would come to her aid.

“I have to head back soon. I have to go into town for Clarice to grab some supplies,” Abbie says. My eyes blur with more tears at hearing she will have to leave me, knowing I will be on my own all day, but I nod sadly, knowing it can’t be helped.

Honestly, with the way Kyson acted earlier, I am surprised he let her come see me. Now I will have to go back to my prison, stuck in the stables where he placed me.

Abbie pulls her lip between her teeth and clutches my fingers gently. “Maybe I can ask if you can come?” she says, hopefully. I know it will never be allowed. However, I never have a chance to answer when I hear screaming coming from the castle’s direction.

My head whips toward the direction of the feminine screams, and I see Ester thrashing and screaming her head off while two guards drag her across the manicured lawns. Abbie stands, and Gannon turns to peer up the hill in the castle’s direction.

“Ha, serves her right,” Abbie chuffs, and I stare at her from where I sit, wondering what happened to Ester that she is being escorted out.

“What did she do?” I ask curiously. Abbie turns and glances down at me and gasps before her head turns to Ester, still thrashing as they lead her toward the front of the castle, toward the enormous iron gates.

“I worry that it may upset you, but nothing happened. The king woke up before she could do anything,” Abbie tells me as she stares down at her hands, picking at her nails.

“Before she did what?” I ask, suddenly feeling sick. Especially knowing she had been with Kyson in the past and clearly has a thing for him still. Despite what everyone said about him looking for a replacement maid before I arrived, the thought still makes my stomach turn. I must admit it has crossed my mind who he would replace me with in his quarters. The thought sickens me.

“The king woke early this morning in his office to Ester fondling him,” Abbie says, and I feel like I will be sick at her words. Bile burns my throat as my heart aches. A whimper leaves my lips before I can stop it as I think of her touching him. Panic bubbles within me, and I feel like I am choking. My ability to breathe is suddenly cut off as my bond screams out for him.

“Hey, hey. Nothing happened, I promise. I heard the guard talking this morning. When he woke, he was livid and tossed her out. He then banished her from the castle, so I guess they finally found her. He did nothing with her, Ivy. I promise you, he never touched her,” she says, clutching my face in her hands.

“That’s it. Breathe, Ivy. He didn’t betray you,” Abbie whispers as I try to stop my panic attack. She wipes my tears. I feel so stupid, so weak. How can a bond have such an effect especially after he threw me out? I hoped it would lessen, yet it’s only growing stronger.

“So, he didn’t sleep with her?” I ask, letting out a breath finally.

“No, apparently, she ran naked from his office crying like her bum was on fire,” Abbie snickers.

I can’t find the humor in her words. The thought of her being near him so intimately sends a sharp pain through my chest. However, it is odd because I also feel bad for her, knowing exactly what it’s like to be tossed away like trash by him. I guess Ester and I have that in common.

Then again, I never find pleasure in another’s pain, even if it is justified. I guess it’s because I’ve known so much pain myself, I wouldn’t wish it on anybody else. Abbie is about to say something when a whistle catches our attention. Abbie and I glance up toward the hill, and we see Clarice wave to us. Abbie gets up, and I know it is time for her to go, but that doesn’t stop the tears knowing I am now alone, just me and the horses.

“I gotta go, but I will try to visit you later,” Abbie says, briefly hugging me before rushing off back down the wharf. I follow, watching as she runs past Gannon and up the hill to Clarice. Damian is coming down the small path leading toward the stables. As I reach the stable doors, I wait for him.

“Sorry about this morning, Beta,” I tell him, baring my neck to him.

“You don’t do that for me, Ivy. You’re my superior, not the other way around,” Damian tells me.

I shake my head. “A superior who is in the stables because her king can’t bear the sight of her,” I tell him, and Gannon wanders over. Damian looks away and clicks his tongue before he clenches his jaw.

“He will get over it, Ivy; he just needs time,” Damian says with a swift nod.

I doubt it.