

## Chapter 11

### IVY

I spend most of the day cleaning. It's tedious work, but once it's done, I feel bored. I realize most of this work is just standing around, waiting for the King to need something. However, this isn't very often because he isn't anywhere in sight.

Clarice brings me new shoes, and I feel strange wearing shoes with actual soles. The brand-new shoes also give me blisters as I walk up and down stairs for hours on end.

Honestly, I don't understand why it's not possible to keep cleaning supplies up there. The stairs are a killer on my legs, and climbing the steps all day makes me exhausted, especially since I still haven't slept.

The majority of the time spent up here is wasted; I could have helped Clarice or Abbie with their chores. Instead, I sit on the bed, waiting for time to tick by while wishing I could see Abbie and check on her.

Just before 5:30 pm, I hear a crash in the corridor. When I open the door, I see Ester's silhouette walking away, her hips swaying as she leaves out the double doors. I glare at the mess she made; she knocked

a potted plant over. When she reaches the stairs, she smirks at me over her shoulder. She saunters away. Cursing under my breath, I look at the mess she created. The soil has spilled all over the floor, and I groan when I see what she's done. However, at least it gives me something to do, so maybe I should thank her for saving me from boredom.

It's difficult for me to understand her instant dislike of me, almost as if she blames me for taking her job. I have done nothing to her. How could I have when I only met her today? Is she trying to get me in trouble so the King will punish me? In a panic, I rush down the steps to fetch a dustpan and broom.

Halfway down the steps, I turn onto the next staircase but don't notice her standing there until it's too late. Ester puts her foot out and trips me. A startled shriek leaves my lips as my body careens forward down the stairs. My stomach lurches as I tumble down the steps. Pain radiates through my body as I hit each step, and I can feel my skin scraping against the hard surface. The air is knocked out of my lungs, and my heart pounds in my chest. The thud of me hitting and rolling down the steps echoes in my ear that are ringing. Finally, I reach the bottom and come to a stop. With a hard thud, my face bounces off the corner of the stair, and I feel my eyebrow tear and split on impact. Sharp pain slivers up my spine as the lashes on my back reopen. In what feels like slow motion, I force myself to roll over onto my back. This causes shooting pain across my ribs, making my breath lodge in my throat. Ester strolls down the steps with a cunning smile on her lips. She stops beside me and looks pitifully down at me.

"Whoops, how clumsy of you; the King doesn't like things left in a mess," she says in a sickly-sweet voice, an evil glint in her eye.

How old is this woman? She's acting like a child, and I feel rage coursing through my veins at her childish actions. I am no different from her; perhaps only a rogue, but still a servant. Why would she want another servant punished?

I bite back tears, wondering what I did to deserve this sort of treatment from her. I never asked for it. All Abbie and I wanted was freedom. As for me, I had accepted my death; I'd come to terms with it. Now that we have a second shot, I want to be set free with Abbie, not become someone else's victim of abuse.

She smiles tauntingly as she walks around a corner and out of sight. I hiss as I stumble to get up, only to see a guard staring at me. His face shows no expression at all about what he just witnessed.

He appears to be guarding the double doors that lead outside. Is this sort of thing acceptable? Do people just abuse whoever they want in this castle? As a trickle of warm blood trickles down my face, I wipe it with the back of my hand.

My eyebrow is indeed split. Great, another wound to tend to. My back throbs as I clutch the banister and pull myself up.

Don't cry, don't cry, I tell myself probably for the millionth time in my life. It's just a scratch; you are being a crybaby. I try to remind myself that I have had more serious injuries and that I shouldn't let it get to me. But I ache all over, and I'm exhausted from the lack of sleep. I slowly

make my way to the cleaning closet, my body aching with every step I take. I stumble towards the cleaning closet, keeping my head down and trying to ignore the pain as I walk, but it's nearly impossible not to wince as I take each step. Finally, I make it to the cleaning closet and collapse against the wall, relieved to be away from the guards.

I open the door and peer around at the shelves of cleaning supplies, finding a rag. I move toward the small sink that nestled in the corner next to the mops and buckets, wetting the rag and pressing it to my bleeding eyebrow. One thing I have realized over the years is that hand and face injuries bleed the worst but usually aren't as deep as they appear.

I take a deep breath and dig through the closet and grab the broom and dustpan. I shut the door with my hip which makes me drop the bucket. Pain slivers across my ribs. Bending down, I grip the handle and pick it up. With hesitant steps, I climb the staircase I am beginning to hate. Each step is agonizing and sends shooting pain all over. It hurts to breathe; it hurts to move. My heels and toes are blistered; my back is searing with pain, and I can feel the bruises already forming on my hip, back, and ribs.

My legs finally give out from under me, and I drop down next to the potted plant as my ass hits the ground hard. Trying to stifle my cry, I pocket the rag I used to stem my bleeding brow before fixing the pot. I put as much dirt as possible back in before cleaning up the remaining soil that had been spilled.

My entire body screams in protest. What a hellish day. I haven't slept since arriving here and was put straight to work. Time seems to be slipping away from me. We left our old pack in the afternoon and arrived at the castle in the morning.

Do Lycans not require sleep?

I pack everything up and head downstairs and outside, dumping the dirt in the garden beds outside the main entrance. Then, I put the equipment away. Once I have finished doing that, I head back upstairs before remembering it is nearly dinner. I look at the enormous grandfather clock next to the guard, who hasn't moved.

How can he stand so still? Then it dawns on me; it is 6 o'clock! I rush back down the few steps I had just walked up, though panic already has me moving quickly. Heading for the kitchen, I skid through the kitchen doors, my shoes screeching on the polished floors and slamming my hip against the countertop.

The moment I walk in, Clarice is waiting for me. She shoves the tray into my hands, clearly unhappy with my late arrival. She doesn't say anything, so I resist the urge to ask if I will be punished. Giving her a quick nod, I turn on my heels and race back upstairs while praying he isn't in his room yet.

I move as quickly as my body allows. With adrenaline coursing through my veins, it's actually pretty fast. As I burst into his room, I freeze immediately. He is already here, sitting in his chair by the bookshelf. The moment I enter, he drops his book onto the small table and he leans

back in his chair watching me. I chew my lip nervously as his face twists into an expression of anger and annoyance. His brows furrow and his jaw clenches. He motions for me to do what I am here for. Yet when I move, his eyes narrow, and his lips press tightly together in a thin line. He is clearly displeased with my tardiness.

Hastily, I move quietly, trying not to draw attention to myself. I place the tray in front of him before taking a step back and bowing. He doesn't say a word, but he clearly isn't pleased that his routine was disrupted; that much is clear.

I escape the King's room and walk to mine. Exhausted, I sit on the bed. As I put my head in my hands, I remember the stupid cut eyebrow I have. The blood trickles down my face again, and I grab my damp rag and dab at the spot to stop it. I want Abbie, and I miss her terribly; we have only been separated for mere hours, and the ache to see her is already overwhelming. This is too hard without her by my side. We always get through everything together.

Sighing, I hold the rag against my brow, wincing at the slight sting. I try to lie down on my side and rest for a moment, trying to find a comfortable position. However, I give up and decide just to endure the pain. I will just close my eyes for a minute...

A knock at my door awakens me; Clarice steps into my small room. She sets her hands on her hips and gives me a disapproving look. Confused, I groan, sitting upright. Clarice's face is stern and her eyes narrow in disapproval. Her lips purse and her brows pinch as she glares at me. Great, another person is disappointed and frustrated with me.

"Are you mad? One day and you fall asleep on the job! The King has been waiting for you to clear his room for two hours!" she hisses at me. As Clarice scolds me, I feel a wave of fear and dread wash over me. My stomach drops as I realize the King has been waiting for me to clear the room for two hours. The thought alone makes me feel sick to my stomach, imagining the King's displeasure, and the consequences I'll have to face.