

Chapter 12

IVY

My eyes flit to the small alarm clock on the small dresser. "Two hours?" I shriek, and Clarice clicks her tongue. With a horrified gasp, I jump to my feet in shock.

"I'm sorry! I must have drifted off! I haven't slept! I will do it now!" I tell Clarice while yanking my shoes on.

"What do you mean you haven't slept?"

"Abbie and I have been up since 3 am yesterday morning. Well, Abbie fell asleep in the car here, but I couldn't sleep, and then we had to work." I shrug, slipping my other shoe on.

Clarice sighs and shakes her head. "Why didn't you tell me that when you arrived? I didn't know, but you need to get your ass in there. I tried to clean the King's room, but he said it's your job, so you have to do it." I cringe at her words.

"Is he mad? Am I in trouble?" I can't help but ask. I'm not sure I can handle any more punishment at the moment.

"Of course, he's mad; he's the King! You made him wait for a rogue servant," she says, and tears brim in my eyes at her words, making me notice what a silly question that was to even ask. I am the lowest of the low in society, the trash. Of course, he's mad at me. Clarice smiles sadly, yet her face is heavy with disappointment. She steps closer and pats my back in what is supposed to be a sympathetic gesture. However, I groan and jerk away from her touch as pain ripples up my back.

"Get it together, Ivy. You are the King's servant. I am trying to help, but I can only do so much," she snaps at me. Dropping my head, I give her a quick nod and she walks out, leaving me to slip out of the room after her.

Lying down had been the worst mistake. Now I feel stiff, which makes the pain even worse. I hesitate to knock on the door and nervously chew my lip. My heart races knowing I have no choice but to go in and face him. Lifting my hand--

"You can enter," he says before I have the chance to knock. I inhale a deep breath, forcing my legs to move. He is sitting on the chaise, reading under the lamp when I enter.

He wears blue pajama pants, his chest bare. I glance away, moving on to the task at hand. My hands tremble as I clean up the mess on his table. His aura tells me he is angry with me, and I fight the urge to cower under it. As I place everything back on the tray, I feel his gaze on me.

I bite my tongue to stop myself from crying out at standing upright. I am impressed with myself; not one noise escapes me, despite wanting to scream with each movement. Only when I look up, the King watches me still. I swallow, drop my head, and walk to the door.

"Come back and see me when you are done," he says, making me freeze. Glancing over my shoulder his gaze goes back to his book.

"Yes, sir," I answer as I turn and walk out. I make the horrendous trek once again down the steps, wondering what my punishment will be when I notice that guard again.

Maybe it is a statue? He hasn't moved. How is that possible? I wave my hand in front of his face. He looks real but nothing: no facial twitch, not even a blink. I shake my head as I move toward the kitchen.

"Dinner," Clarice says as she points to the plate on the bench when I enter through the doors.

"I can't. The King asked me to go back to see him," I explain.

"Very well, off you go then. Don't make him wait; you already did that," she says.

Turning, I leave with my stomach growling, but I ignore it. It is not the first time I have gone hungry, and it won't be the last—that I am sure of.

I use the banister to help force my legs up the stairs for the hundredth time today. This is a joke. Maybe after a while, if he doesn't kill me for messing up, he will let me keep some supplies in my room. This will save me from walking up the steps every time I need a cloth or a broom or something. I can only hope.

The King opens the door before I can knock. My stomach twists with dread; this is it. There's no doubt I'm about to be killed or hurt for my mistake.

He steps aside, and I keep my eyes on the floor when I move past him. I stand how Mrs. Daley taught us: hands behind my back, looking straight ahead. Everything burns and aches standing like this, yet I endure it. The King shuts the door and turns to me.

"Did Clarice give you your orders?" the King asks, walking around me. I briefly wonder if I will cop a cane or the whip.

"Yes, sir," I answer.

"So you chose to ignore chores and orders?" he asks.

I feel tears prick at the back of my eyes. I shake my head, and my lips part to explain, but quickly shut my mouth. I know it is my fault and I have no excuse good enough for not doing my tasks.

"You didn't answer," he states. I swallow. Am I allowed to argue back? "Well?" he demands. I chew my lip, and my fingers fiddle behind my back nervously.

"I fell asleep; it won't happen again," I stutter. King Kyson rubs his chin and jaw before he moves to his chaise and sits down. I watch as he places his elbows on his knees and leans forward.

"I have a strict schedule for a reason. My days are meticulously planned out. I can't have a servant who can't follow simple rules and stick to a simple timetable, do you understand?"

I nod. The King keeps staring at my face, which makes me nervous. I see his eyes narrow slightly at my split brow, but he says nothing. Why would he? I am a servant; he is the King. I should be grateful I am still standing and not thrown into a cell for my laziness.

"I understand," I tell him, chewing the inside of my lip when he sighs.

"You also forgot to clear the washing in the bathroom," he says, wiping a hand down his face.

I nod, about to set to the task, but he waves me off when I try to head for the bathroom.

"Forget it; I already had Ester grab everything while you slept," he says, and I look down, embarrassed.

I am already in trouble, and Ester got her wish to be his servant again. Well, she can have the job; I don't want it. I rather slave labor outdoors than feel like I'm walking on eggshells over every little thing while the King waits for me to slip up.

"You can leave," he says dismissively, and I quickly escape back to my room. I open my door to find a sandwich wrapped in cling wrap, as well as another maid's outfit and a small juice box.

Clarice must have snuck them to me. Relief floods me, and I sit on the bed peeling my new flats off. My heels are bleeding and I need to shower, but even that task feels impossible.

Giving myself a sniff, to my surprise, I smell clean, thanks to all the cleaning products. I settle on my bed, careful of my back, and pick up the sandwich and unwrap it. It feels like so much effort as I force myself to chew and swallow.

I feel exhausted but starving. Why did I have to be the king's servant? I know this will be the loneliest job in the castle, and what is up with his erratic behavior: so hot one moment and cold the next? One second, he almost seems kind, like he forgets he is speaking to a lowly rogue. The next moment, he looks at me like he wants to kill me.