

## Chapter 19

### IVY

The last three days have been a disaster. Ester keeps finding ways to sabotage me and get me in trouble. So far, I have been having trouble with Clarice, one of the cooks, and now I find myself staring down at the broken vase she deliberately shattered.

To top it off, I have a fever; my back seems to have an infection. I fight back the tears while retrieving my dustpan and broom and start to sweep the mess up. She isn't even supposed to be up here, yet I always catch her tampering with my work. She always waits to see my reaction, then darts off. This time, glass is scattered everywhere. It's a wonder it didn't cut me.

Gosh, I wonder how much it costs? It looks so expensive, so I know I'm in trouble. Hearing voices on the stairs, my breathing becomes erratic, and I start grabbing the big chunks and dropping them in the bin as quickly as possible. Yet this causes me to slice my fingertips, making me hiss. I'm so over the injuries. I'm over constantly aching. I just want to rest.

Being here is worse than being at the orphanage. I swear my ribs are broken on my left side. The bruising is now a deep dark purple with yellowing around the edges from Ester tripping me on the stairs.

My new shoes also give me hell, though someone keeps supplying me with thick socks for which I am grateful. In addition, someone gave me a blanket from the King's room. I had wondered if it was him since the first morning when I woke up with it draped over me. I cautiously place it back in his room, only to find it tossed over me again the following morning. I have kept it ever since.

I have noticed, though, that the King has been on edge and hasn't been working much or leaving his room much. I also saw him snap at a few guards.

Another thing I have noticed is that he is lately smelling heavily of liquor. The last few times I have brought him dinner I could tell he was drunk. His behavior has been strange. Sometimes I even notice him following me around, which is terrifying. I can't think with his intense staring, and I mess up constantly which ends up angering him even more.

Sweeping quickly, I hear the voices getting closer, and I can tell it's the King. A piece of glass scoots across the floor with the sweep of the broom before the guard's foot stops it. I blink, wondering if I imagined it. He bends down, picks it up, and tosses it in my bin before winking at me.

He used to guard the stairs and door on the below level, but he has been stationed up here for the last two days. This is the first time I have seen him move. At one point, I thought he was a statue, but now I have proof that he is a living, breathing being.

"Thank you," I whisper to him, and he nods before staring straight ahead again. I hiss, clutching my ribs as I bend to scoop up the last of the shattered glass into the dustpan. I am about to stand when King Kyson and Beta Damian turn into the corridor.

"Oh, for the love of God, what did you break this time?" King Kyson groans while shaking his head. I drop my eyes to the floor and swallow. That's it. I have done it now. I wonder how many lashings I will get for it.

"Sorry, sir," I tell him. It is better to take the blame than to have her come after me for snitching. I also don't want to risk his wrath by passing the blame onto someone else.

The King turns slightly and faces his Beta, who watches me get scolded by the king, making this entire ordeal more embarrassing.

"I will see you later, Damian," King Kyson tells him, walking into his bedroom.

"Ivy, come in here and shut the door behind you," the King yells out, and I pause at my task.

Oh no, please don't be too angry. Shit! I mouth to myself. Grabbing the bin and broom I set them next to the door. I gaze at the ceiling, blinking back tears as fear slivers along my veins. I clench my fists a few times, trying to build up the courage to walk in and face the King's wrath.

He has been in a terrible mood. I have seen so many sides of him in just a few days. I've witnessed his anger and noticed his stress as he paces his room, forgetting I am there while muttering to himself.

Clarice said some anniversary is coming up, but wouldn't tell me what the anniversary was—just that I should expect outbursts and try to steer clear of him. But it's challenging when he sometimes follows me to ensure I do my job correctly, always hovering and breathing down my neck.

"Ivy! Now!" King Kyson yells again, his tone of voice irritated. I step in, shutting the door to find him rummaging through a box while sitting on the edge of his bed. My stomach drops. What will he do to me?

"What took you so long? Come here," he says, pointing between his legs. I stare at the space where he wants me to stand then look at him, only to find him watching me again. "Do I need to drag you here? Now, Ivy. My patience is running low," he snaps, pointing to the space between his legs.

I force my feet to move and stand next to him. He growls and glares up at me, annoyed. Gripping my wrist, he yanks me to stand where he ordered, his knees touching my thighs.

Peering down, I realize he has medical supplies in the box and I step back, only for him to pull me back in place, pressing his knees on either side of my legs so I don't move away again.

"You haven't changed your bandages in days. Clarice said she sent you to the infirmary yesterday, but the nurse said she never saw you, and that you never came to see her. Why is that?" he questions.

He is correct; I knew my back was getting infected. But if the nurse sees the bruises and my ribs, she may put me off work, and if I can't work, what use am I? They would probably kill me if I didn't earn my keep. This isn't an orphanage, and I'm expected to work, and for the King of all people.

"It's all better now," I tell him, which does nothing but earn me a glare.

"Don't lie to me. I can smell it in your bloodstream. Don't forget what I am, Ivy; my senses are stronger than yours. Now remove the uniform and don't lie to me again," he says. Shaking my head I try to step back, but his legs hold me in place.

"Ivy, remove your uniform, or I will do it for you," he warns. His gaze holding mine dares me to disobey him. My lips quiver, and I grip the buttons, not wanting to take the dress off.

"I will ask to see the nurse now," I blurt out, and he growls at me, making me shake like a leaf.

He reaches for the buttons on my dress, and I slap his hand, trying to pull away from him when I realize what I just did. I freeze—nibbling on my bottom lip to stop it from quivering and suppressing a whimper

at the look he gives me. I just slapped the King away! How could I be so stupid?

"Did you just slap...?" He doesn't finish; he shakes his head, reaching for my buttons again. My eyes burn with tears that threaten to spill over, yet I force myself not to react. Just block it out. I take a deep breath and try to focus on the wall behind him, willing myself to stay still.

"Will you stop shaking? Why do you smell of fear? Have I hurt you?" he snaps at me.

I shake my head as he stares at me.

"If I wanted to hurt you, I would have already. I could have punished you multiple times over the last two days for messing up and the vase you just broke, but I haven't. What is wrong with you and Abbie? So bloody skittish, it infuriates me," he growls.

"I'm sorry, sir. I will do better," I tell him while clutching the front of my dress.

"Kyson. My name is Kyson, and don't apologize. It's just annoying that you scare so easily when we have treated you with nothing but kindness," he says, reaching for my buttons again. He stops when he notices I am holding it, then reaches for my arms and growls. Grabbing my hands, he pries them away from my dress. He places my hands on his legs. When I move them off his thighs, he growls, making me return them.

"Ivy, I won't hurt you," he tells me while undoing the last button. Why is he insisting on doing this? I said I would see the nurse. He untucks the bandage's small clip, his eyes on the task as he fiddles with it.

"Now turn around," he says. His legs open to allow me to turn. I turn around, glad I don't have to see his face staring at my body. He pulls my dress down off my shoulders to bunch at my waist before moving further back onto the bed. Warm, firm hands move to my hips, and he pulls me to sit between his legs on the edge of his bed.