

Chapter 21

IVY

The day seems to drag on. There were a few times when I tried to sneak out of the room to do my chores, but every time I tried to do so, King Kyson would call me back into the room before pointing to his bed. "Rest," he would say before turning back to his work.

Eventually, I gave up trying. So I am relieved when he is finally called out of the room, which gives me a chance to breathe a little easier. He has been forcing me to eat, sit and watch him work all day.

I stick my head out the door to ensure he is gone. Then, I hurry down the corridor. He didn't say I couldn't leave the room before he left, and I know I am falling behind on my chores.

Retrieving my cleaning supplies from the downstairs cupboard, I quickly head back to the room, where I change the linens and clean the bathroom.

Each movement makes me cringe. However, I am glad to be doing something other than watching the King, who spends most of the day watching me over his laptop while he was supposed to be working. It made for some awkward stare-offs; the man could stare without

blinking while I nervously stared around the room to avoid his gaze, which only seemed to amuse him.

Why does he insist on waiting around with his servant? He had hardly left the room all day. When I am done scrubbing the bathroom, I take my cleaning supplies back to the cupboard downstairs before making a quick dash to the servant's bathroom. I desperately need to pee. I have been holding my bladder all day.

Relieving myself quickly, I step out of the bathroom only to walk into the guard from upstairs.

"Sorry," I whisper, wondering why he is standing in front of the ladies bathroom. He says nothing, just remains in place, and stares at the door. The man is always silent! I make my way back to the cleaning cupboard only to notice him following me like an extra shadow. Is he ensuring I do my chores correctly?

I grab my dusting cloth and polish before heading back upstairs. My legs ache from working after spending most of the day sitting stiffly on the edge of the king's bed. Thankfully, the guard does not follow me into the room; instead, he waits by the door again.

I look at all the books on the King's enormous bookcase and gulp. My eyes scan over them, wondering if any are out of place. I also try to remember which book belongs where just in case I have to dust the books. What if I got them in the wrong order? The spines are all decorative and in impeccable order, not like the picture books in the orphanage that were falling apart and the pages were torn.

Maybe I shouldn't dust the shelf...

I can hardly read anything except my name, which my mother taught me before she died. Abbie is the same. We both struggle to read a simple sentence. There isn't much need to read when you are a rogue. Books are heavy and not easy to carry around.

I touch one, liking the fancy writing down the spine, when I hear his voice behind me, making me jump away from the shelf.

"You can read them," he says, leaning against the doorframe of his bedroom. He stares at me. How long has he been there before catching me?

"Sorry, My King," I tell him, dropping my gaze to the floor. Why did I touch it? I shouldn't have snooped. He walks over to his chair and sits on it while I try to avoid his gaze.

"Which one were you looking at?" he asks, and I glance at him. His eyes scan the bookcase, and I chew my lip nervously. His eyes dart to my lips, and I stop. Instead, I look down at my hands. Will he punish me for touching them? I was told to be careful around his books.

Mrs. Daley would have beaten me bloody if I touched anything of hers. Rogues were supposed to mind their place. Here, I sometimes forget that I'm nothing but a rogue on whom the King took pity. I still don't understand why he didn't cast us out or kill us.

"Pass it to me," he says, holding his hand out for the book. I look at the shelf and reach for the book but pause. What if it's a trick?

"Pass me the book, Ivy. You know I don't like repeating myself," he says softly, yet his voice is still firm. I nod and reach for the book with the golden letters, pulling it from the shelf and quickly handing it to him.

"Ah, Treasure Island," he says, reading the title. I wasn't sure what it said. I just liked the inscription on the side.

"Can you read?" he asks.

"No, sir," I answer honestly.

"Come here."

I look down at my hands, feeling nervous in his presence, though he has never hurt either of us. However, I know he can do it if he sees fit. He clicks his tongue, sitting up a bit more.

"Ivy, don't shy away from me now," he says, holding his hand out to me. Staring at his outstretched hand, I move hesitantly, walking toward him.

I always feel funny around this man. Being a rogue, I shouldn't even be in his presence, let alone allowed to talk to him. Touching him should be out of the question.

"Do you want me to command you?" he asks, and I look at his face to find him smiling. His smile is breathtaking, his silver eyes sparkling back at me.

Chewing my lip, I shake my head, walking over to him. When I am close enough, he reaches out and grabs my wrist. Then, he does something he definitely shouldn't... but then again, he has done plenty he shouldn't have done with his rogue servant already.

He pulls me onto his lap. I sit awkwardly and move, trying to climb off him. "My King," I exclaim when he holds me against him.

"Kyson. I hate that you keep calling me 'My King,'" he tells me.

"But you are, and I shouldn't be sitting on your lap," I tell him as I try to hop off, but his hand on my stomach pulls me back against him.

"That is enough, Ivy. You'll remain where you are. No one can see you. It is just you and me here."

"Yes, but, My King," I protest when he grabs my chin between his fingers and tilts my face toward his. Sparks rush over my skin, and I

forget how to breathe, holding my breath at the sensation coursing through me.

"Kyson. You can call me, Kyson," he tells me again, his face so close that his breath fans my lips. I suddenly feel light-headed, and he brushes his thumb across my bottom lip, tugging it down slightly.

His eyes are mesmerizing, glowing brightly as they dart to my lips briefly before flicking back to mine. His scent is overwhelming and masculine, making me want to breathe in deeply to savor it. Yet somehow, I've forgotten how to breathe with his face so close to mine. His full lips move, and it takes me a second to register his words.

"Breathe, Ivy. I don't want you to pass out on me," he says, swallowing. His eyes are still on my lips. I let out a breath, and his lips tugged at the corners of his mouth before letting me go.

"Do you want me to read it to you?" he asks.

"No, I couldn't ask that. I am sure you are too busy," I say, straightening my spine.

"That's not what I asked Ivy. Calm down." He lifts his hand, placing it between my breasts. "Your heart is racing. How many times do I have to tell you I won't hurt you?" he asks, shaking his head. He abruptly moves, turns me on his lap, and pulls my legs up over his.