

## Chapter 24

### IVY

I wake up, not knowing how much time has passed. I don't recognize where I am, so I look up at the ceiling only to see the King's bed canopy above me. Blinking, I vaguely hear people talking when something beside me moves which makes the bed dip. I glance around, seeing Beta Damian and Gannon at the end of the bed. Turning my head, I see the King sitting beside me. I am in his bed!

"Sleeping beauty awakens," Beta Damian announces. I jerk upright, only for a hand to land on my shoulder and push me down again. My back protests at being lain on.

"Lie back down. I gave you quite the scare. I didn't mean to, but you will stay in here with me tonight," the King says calmly, and I shake my head, trying to get back up.

"You will stay with me tonight," he repeats, leaving no room for argument.

Frantically, I look to his Beta and Gamma, who say nothing in my defense. Are they really planning to leave me in here with him? He was a beast a few seconds ago. What about Clarice's words? She said not to

come near him in this form and stay out of his way. I can't do that if he forces me to remain here with him.

"I'm sorry to get you all out of bed. Leave the rest. I will have it fixed tomorrow," King Kyson tells them.

"You sure you can handle the mess?" his Beta asks.

"I am sure I can manage," the King tells them, and both men's eyes dart to me for a second before they both bare their necks and walk out, leaving me alone with a man that could become a savage beast at any moment. Only minutes ago, I thought I would die.

The door clicks shut softly and my breathing picks up. Despite the room's vast size, I suddenly feel claustrophobic and caged in like a mouse trapped in a lion's den.

Overwhelmed, I pray that I will pass out again. Terror fills me, and I am suddenly too frightened to move.

"I won't hurt you, Ivy. I didn't mean to lose control like that," he says, his voice calm and composed, as if nothing had happened. "You can speak freely. It's just us, not that Damian or Gannon would ever speak against you," he says.

I am already very aware of that fact. Because they just left me alone and trapped me in here with a man that looked more like a terrifying

creature than a person mere moments ago. I swing my legs over the side of the bed, wanting to go back to the safety of my room.

"Lie back down now," he orders, and my body falls back on the bed under the command, unable to fight it as it washes over me like a tidal wave of pure Alpha dominance.

His blankets are soft under my hands, but my back shouts in protest and I can't help the whimper that escapes my lips. "You don't leave me!" he growls and tears prick my eyes.

"What's wrong? Answer me," he asks, leaning over me.

"My back... Please, I can't lay on it," I tell him, and his eyes widen and he pulls away.

"Sorry, I forgot. You may roll on your side," he says, turning me to face him. His skin is clear – no longer covered in fur – except for the shadowing of stubble on his face. His dark eyes watch me curiously. "I am a man, not a beast now. Don't be frightened," he says, grabbing my hand and placing it on his chest. He holds it there, and my eyes look at my hand, his skin warm beneath my palm.

All I can do is blink at the man that is becoming stranger by the second—and why does he keep touching me? Does he have a rogue fetish?

I have heard of such things mentioned by the adults at the orphanage. Abbie and I once overheard one of the gardeners speaking to Mrs. Daley about having a rogue fetish.

He said that he liked being a 'puppet master' and that he hoped we would be auctioned off when we came of age so he could buy one of us to use for his fantasies.

For some reason, that day is forever ingrained in my memory. I clench my eyes shut, trying to shove the memory away. Yet, no matter how hard I try to shake the thoughts off, they eventually consume me and force me back there to relive them. Our past is always lurking in the shadows of our minds, haunting us like ghosts.

On that terrible day, the gardener had leaned against his shovel, having just dug up the vegetable patch as he talked to the butcher who had just dropped off the meat rations. He was a middle-aged man with a thick build and sun-weathered skin. He had a gruff, stern demeanor, and his dark eyes hinted at something sinister. He had a thick beard, and his clothes were dirty and tattered from his garden work.

Abbie and I picked up the last of the carrots he dug up and dropped them into our baskets.

"Mrs. Daley," the gardener had said as Mrs. Daley set some lemonade down on the steps

"Hmm?" she hummed.

"How much?" he had asked, making me glance over at him to find his dark eyes on us. I peered down at the carrots in the basket.

"I'd like to buy one of them. I'm sure they'd make a good servant or even a pet." He chuckled, and Mrs. Daley huffed.

"Servant, yes, that is about all they're good for!"

"Well, I can think of a few other ways," the butcher laughed. Mrs. Daley purses her lips, and I watch her through the veil of my hair as I continue to rummage for carrots in the upturned soil.

"Are they obedient?" the gardener questioned. Mrs. Daley whistled, and we both looked up.

"Get up!" she snapped. Abbie and I both immediately stand, wiping our hands on our aprons.

The gardener laughed. "Perfect, nothing I love more than playing puppet master." Abbie and I looked at each other.

"Are the rogue girls at the brothel not doing it for you no more?" the butcher inquired.

"Don't pretend you don't have a rogue fetish, Martin. I have seen how you order them around." The butcher laughed.

"I never denied it, but they aren't as obedient as these two," the gardener stated, nodding toward us.

"Back to work!" Mrs. Daley snapped at us, and we dropped back to the ground, gathering the carrots.

"Hands off the redhead. I've got that one well-trained. You can have the other," the butcher replied.

"That is if the Alpha lets them live!" Mrs. Daley huffed, causing the gardener to groan.

"Why did you have to say that? Ruin my fantasy... Charlene," the gardener said. Abbie and I glanced at one another. That was the first time we heard someone use her first name. The gardener stomped off to his gardening.

"Such a shame that the chances they live are so slim... Such a waste," the butcher exclaimed.

The butcher gave her the bill, and Mrs. Daley opened her purse to pay.

"Maybe one day we could find another arrangement?" asked the butcher. Mrs. Daley looked at him strangely.

"We can discuss it another time, Doyle. When Katrina is not around. You know she is fond of the mutts."

The Butcher, too, was just as sick, if not worse, because he eventually acted on his sick amusements.

Back then, we didn't know what he meant when we heard the term. We were only twelve, and it wasn't until we grew older that we learned what they truly meant by those words and the intentions behind them – it meant becoming his sex slave, to be dominated by some sicko. Abbie swore she would kill herself if he or the butcher bought her and I vowed the same.

"I know you're scared, but please don't fear me. I don't want you to be scared of me," the King says, tearing me from the invading memory. I blink and turn my attention to the King.

"And just for the record, Lycans don't eat people," he says with a soft laugh.

Was this the same man as before? I briefly entertain the idea that he had a lobotomy while I was passed out. He seems so carefree now, just an ordinary person with how he speaks so casually. I could almost lose sight of the fact that he was a King.

"Where did you just go?" he asks, leaning down and sniffing at me. I freeze as he leans over me, pressing his nose into my neck. He pulls away, giving me a strange look. "Surely, I didn't make your fear this potent?" he asks.

"Nowhere, my King," I answer, not wanting to anger him.

"Not physically, Ivy. Your mind, where did it take you? You seem confused," he states, and I nod, sucking my bottom lip into my mouth. Yet he still holds my hand.

"You are the only person, other than Gannon and Damian, that has gotten near me in that state and not been hurt or killed. In my Lycan form, I recognized you even after I lost control," he says, and my brows pinch. Was that supposed to make me feel better about the situation—that he didn't kill me?

"You speak very little. You're so quiet all the time," he states, looking at me inquisitively. What am I supposed to say? I'm a filthy rogue that you ordered to lie in your bed with you for some reason, and you are rubbing my hand encased in your huge one like I am some pet you are trying to decide whether to put out of its misery?

He tilts his head to the side, watching me for a second as he holds my gaze. I can't pull mine away. He shakes his head in amusement, releasing the hold he has over me. The King then yawns, covering his mouth and rolling onto his back. Yet he doesn't let go of my hand, still clasping it in his.



I want to tug it away from him, but I also like the feel of his big hand covering mine – the tingles make my body relax, and I yawn, too, wondering what time it is.

The King eventually falls asleep, soft snores filling the room, and I think I lie there frozen for about an hour before I gain the courage to reclaim my hand and carefully sit up.

With slow movements, I try to move toward the edge of the bed. I'm careful not to move the bed too much.

I stand up and take a step, and the floorboard creaks under my foot. I freeze. My heartbeat thumps in my ears frantically. I glance over at him before taking another when he speaks.

"I will give you three seconds to get back in the bed with me, or you may find yourself tied to it and unable ever to leave it, Ivy. The choice is yours," King Kyson states with a mischievous smile on his face. I gulp, my heart pounding in my chest at his words while I consider my options.