

Chapter 26

IVY

"Queen Tatiana and King Garret?" I ask. I don't know why I said those names, but I vaguely remember overhearing my mother mention those names before she was killed. In fact, she screamed it. Screamed it with so much hatred that it must have stuck with me.

"I am surprised you know those names. You would have only been a small child during their power," the King says, his eyes studying me.

"I remember hearing the names. Is that where you are...?" I ask before shutting my mouth and mentally cursing myself. Quiet Ivy, you don't question the King, I remind myself, yet he said I could ask questions. But old habits make me question every little thing; is it a trick; is he using it to find something to punish me for?

"Why do you do that? You're going to say something, then stop?" he asks before rolling and tugging me with him. My stomach lurches when he pulls me to straddle his lap as he sits up and leans against the headboard of the bed.

This new position is even more awkward than the last, and I become rigid. My hands awkwardly clutch my thighs as I sit up, wanting to climb off him. It's impossible to relax in a position like this.

The King grabs my hands. I try to pull out of his grip when he places both of them on his naked chest. I stare at my hands touching him, my eyes roaming over him. His chest was broad and hard, with defined muscles and lightly tanned skin. There is a light dusting of dark hair across his chest, yet his skin is soft despite the hardness of muscle beneath his skin.

His skin is hot under my palms, and I can feel his heart beating steadily in his chest while mine sputters, threatening to rip free of my body.

"You never answered?" the King says, making me try to remember his question. "Why do you stop when you want to know something? Knowledge is the key. You should ask questions. How else would you learn the answers? I like it when you speak. I want to know everything about you. I find you fascinating."

Me? Fascinating? How? The only thing he could learn from me was how to change his bedsheets and fold his towels the way he likes them. There is absolutely nothing remarkable about me that he could want to know.

"And to answer your question, yes, I am going there tomorrow, but I would like it if you came with me. Would you like to come?"

"Is it okay for me to leave the castle?" I ask.

"Under guard, but yes, you can leave."

Why would I need a guard? I wonder, but the thought of leaving excites me.

"Can Abbie come?"

"She can, but I would rather it be just us. I want to spend time with you. Although, if you would be more comfortable with her coming, I can arrange it," he says.

"Why?" I blurt like an idiot. It makes no sense as to why he would want to spend time with his servant. It is odd. The King smiles. I don't think I have seen him smile as much as I have tonight. Yet I find that I like it when he does.

"So you can speak your mind... and you now you ask the right questions," he chuckles, his hands landing on my thighs.

He runs his hands up to the apex of my legs, and it hits me—I glance down at my naked legs. Shame washes over me. Where did my pants go? I tug, trying to get my oversized shirt down, when I realize it is one of his.

"My King?" I ask, tugging at the neckline of the shirt I am wearing.

"Mmm?" he asks, his eyes on his hands as he pushes the hemline of his shirt higher, revealing my cotton panties beneath it. "I changed your

clothes; I prefer it when you smell like me," he tells me, answering the question I needed to know but couldn't bring myself to ask. His words make me swallow.

"They didn't see you; I made them turn around," he murmurs, yet his eyes still watch his hands as they slide up to my hips. His thumbs brush over my panties, and he inhales deeply.

"I don't want you sleeping in that room anymore. You will remain with me. I will have your things brought in here tomorrow when we are gone."

My brain buzzes, yet I am still stuck on the question of why.

His eyes dart to mine. "You want to know why? It must be confusing."

I nod my head.

"I have never wanted someone the way I have wanted you, and I won't get much sleep with you so far away. I want you close," he says, looking up at me.

"But sir, I am your slave," I speak slowly, hoping my words will sink in and make him see reason, or at least clarify what he wants with me.

"And I am the King. No one would dare question my intentions, Ivy."

"What are your intentions?" I whisper.

"What do you think they are?" he asks in return.

Well, if I knew, I wouldn't be asking, I think dryly.

"Speak freely, Ivy. You are safe with me."

I briefly wonder if I should say it, yet he keeps telling me I can ask, and the burning desire to know is bothering me. What's the worst he could do, kill me? At least I would die knowing.

"Do you have a rogue fetish?" I ask. His eyebrows raise and he appears to be shocked by my words.

His lips tug up into a grin before he laughs. His whole body moves beneath me like he can't contain his laughter at what I asked.

"No, I don't have a rogue fetish, Ivy. I also don't eat people; I am not trying to have sex with you, though I wouldn't say no if you wanted to, and I don't want you to be my slave anymore. Does that clear up any of your odd questions, or are there more?" he chuckles again. The blood rushes to my face when he speaks again.

"And what is a rogue fetish? Where did you hear that?" he asks, his eyes narrowing in a playful way. My face heats up more at his question. I didn't think I would have to explain it to him. Shouldn't he know?

"Um, at the orphanage..."

"At the orphanage? By whom?" he asks, his facial expression suddenly turning serious.

"The gardener... Abbie and I overheard him saying he had a fetish for rogues. He liked that he could do what he wanted to them, and no one would care. He hoped we would be sold so he could buy us and said we were more obedient than other girls."

"He said that in front of you both?"

"No, we weren't supposed to be listening." I scratch my neck and try to climb off him, but his hands move to my thighs, holding me in place.

"When? Just before I saw you?" he asks.

I shake my head. "No, when I was twelve. We didn't understand what he meant... not until Abbie asked Katrina."

The King growls angrily and his eyes flicker.

"Children are off-limits! I hate how they treat the rogues," he snarls, making me jump slightly at his tone, though his words confuse me; wasn't he the one that made the laws?