

Chapter 31

KYSON

Her awkwardness is adorable, though also slightly annoying when it persists. I can tell how uncomfortable she is doing everyday, mundane things that should be normal to anybody. It shows me just how damaged her life has been.

Ivy always stands like she's waiting for orders or waiting for me to ask her to do something. Unless I force her to sit, she'll remain standing. Simple things no one would even question doing; she has to be told to do. It's irritating and infuriating to me. At least she put the clothes on, but now she's standing at the door with her eyes straight ahead, hands behind her back.

We just bathed together, yet she is still trying to be my servant. She acts like it's uncomfortable for her to be herself, or maybe she just isn't used to being herself—only used to the version of what everyone wants her to be. It's like watching someone who is institutionalized. She can't function outside of the routine she is used to, the script others wrote for her, or her brain will short-circuit.

When another knock raps on the door, I know the car is ready. I watch her move to open it before standing back in her corner as if she can blend into the bookcase. I growl and shake my head. She shifts her

weight from one foot to the other as my Beta walks in, noticing her and looking her over.

He knows she is my mate. He also knows my struggle with her to be a person and not a damn slave that answers my every whim. I so much as mutter about something, and she is going to clean it or fix it! I rub my temples feeling a headache building. I want to scream and break something. She is driving me crazy and I feel like I am walking on eggshells trying not to scare her.

As soon Ivy got dressed, she raced around cleaning up the mess I had made the night before, even after I told her not to. She muttered about it being her job to clean. When I tried to help, she would get to it before I could. It got to the point where I was trying to race her. I managed a few things – being quicker on my feet than her – yet I could see it bothered her that I was doing tasks that had originally been assigned to her. It's almost as though she thought she would get in trouble if someone walked in on me cleaning my own room. Eventually, I just shake my head and let her continue whatever she was doing.

"Morning, Ivy," Damian says to her, and she bows respectfully, showing her neck to him.

"Morning, Beta," she answers politely.

Damian scratches his neck awkwardly while looking at me as I try to suppress a growl. I know it also irritates him that she uses his title, especially since she will outrank him once she figures out that I am her mate. Shit, she will probably outrank me! I don't think I could deny her

anything. However, the chances of her actually ever asking for anything, I am realizing, are very slim.

Damian drops his backpack on the ground by the door, and Ivy moves to pick it up. In response, I growl, and she jumps, not expecting it. "Leave it!" I tell her, my words coming off harsher than intended. I don't want her picking up after me, let alone anyone else. Her eyes immediately fell to the floor. I click my tongue and purse my lips before Damian's voice flits through my head as he mind-links me.

"I thought you two were on the same page?" he says.

"So did I, but she still insists on being my servant. She has been standing there for ten minutes now."

"But I could have sworn you were in the bath with her this morning."

"I was," I answer flatly, and his brows furrow.

"Did you have a fight?"

"What? No, I think it's just how she is," I tell him.

I grab my phone and wallet and toss them to Damian, who catches them and puts them in his pocket.

"Maybe she thinks she is your sex slave or something," Damian suggests, still using the link.

"She does. Only, we didn't have sex," I answer.

"Ivy, come. We are leaving," I tell her, and she nods, following a few steps behind us down the hall. Damian stops to wait for her to fall in line with me, but she also stops.

"Ivy," I snap at her. She looks at me, and I motion her toward me before grabbing her hand. She glances at my fingers linked through hers. Her entire body tenses as she looks at the guards who pay no attention whatsoever, just like they are trained to do.

"My..."

She begins to address me, and I growl at her. I know she is going to protest me touching her in public, as she keeps glancing at the guards, who are well aware of who she is to me. I'm pretty sure the entire castle knows, except Ivy and Abbie.

How they haven't figured it out yet is beyond me. So I notice instantly when she tries to pull her hand from mine gently, but I don't allow it.

"They won't hurt you. You are doing nothing wrong," I try to reassure her, but she is still frozen in place like she's waiting for someone to scream 'Off with her head' for merely being near me.

I try to remain calm, but I am fuming at how timid she is. Damian has complained all week about Abbie being the same. He said it's like she is mute. She even managed to scare him a couple of times with how quiet she is. Meanwhile, Ivy tries to tug her hand from mine again, and I tighten my grip.

Ivy's heart races when I yank her to me, crushing her petite frame against my chest. I press my lips against hers quickly, and she pulls away from me. She looks around nervously before I use the calling on her, forcing her to submit to me.

There are many perks to being a Lycan man—the calling for one. I have used it on her a few times, and she still hasn't realized what it is and why it calms her. However, it only works on our mates.

I used to laugh when my sister would get all worked up and be a blubbering mess or a screaming banshee from pregnancy hormones – until her mate would start purring. I think he could sway her to do anything when he used it.

It was odd to me whenever I witnessed it. I couldn't figure out how it worked. When I was younger, I had asked about why Lycan men used it on their mates. I hadn't understood the need to use it, but now, with Ivy, I can understand it and why it is called a calling; I found I did it without even thinking about it with Ivy. Like some extra sense picking up on her distress.

The calling is like a sedative of sorts that only a mate could use to subdue their other half. I am sure it was used in more barbaric situations initially, like with my mother.

My father was an excellent King and father, although I know my mother wasn't his fated mate. It was an arranged marriage, and she refused him when they married... declining to be marked by him.

Neither wanted to marry, but once he marked her, the rest was history. I often watched growing up how she always seemed calm around him. It wasn't until after they passed, and I saw my sister and her mate, that I understood why my father always purred when my mother was near.

Ivy hadn't been marked, though. And when I first did it, without her being of age, I couldn't exactly be a hundred percent positive she was my mate, until I realized the calling sedated her. It could only be used on mates or those marked and taken as mates.

So, I knew without a doubt – like Damian had been suspecting – that she was, in fact, my mate, or it wouldn't have worked without me marking her.

Ivy presses closer, seeking me out, her body turning languid in my arms as I pull her to me. Gripping her chin, I tilt her face up and kiss her. She tries to fight the haze washing over her, I pull her closer, my chest vibrating against her hands, and I deepen the kiss. Her tongue plays with mine, and I smile against her lips before letting her go, but not her hand.

Her face flushes pink, and as she glances around, Damian nods and smiles at her. The guards stare straight ahead. She turns, looking toward the stairs, when she suddenly steps back, bumping into me. I follow her gaze to see Ester at the end of the corridor watching us. Ivy tenses and shifts her weight awkwardly, trying to move behind me. I pull back in front of me, wrapping my arm around her waist, my fingers pressing into her in warning not to move. The look on Ester's face shows her jealousy, while Ivy's shows fear. Now, why is my mate scared of this servant?

"Ester, what are you doing here? You don't work on my floor anymore," I tell her. I don't like the way she glares at Ivy. When her gaze turns to me, her entire demeanor changes swiftly.

"My King, Clarice wanted to know if you were ready to leave. She packed some lunch for your drive," Ester says in a sugary-sweet voice. I nod to her, yet Ivy won't even look in her direction, her fingers gripping the back of my jacket so tightly her knuckles are pressing under her skin, turning them white. My hand covers hers, prying it off, and I lift it, pressing my lips to her knuckles. "What is it?" I whisper to her and she glances at Ester briefly.

"Nothing, my King," she whispers. I want to yell at her for using my title, but I can see she is scared.

‘Is Ester not her friend?’ I ask Damian through the mindlink.

‘I haven't seen them together,’ he answers simply.

I nod and tug on Ivy's hand. Her heart pounds in her chest, and I glance down at where she stands slightly behind me, staring vacantly at the wall.

"You may leave, Ester," I say without looking at her, not taking my eyes off my mate. Maybe she feels awkward because Ester is a servant like she used to be, or I hope she used to be. I don't want her waiting on me anymore, but getting that habit to stop is becoming a challenge.

"The King dismissed you, Ester; on your way," Damian snaps, and I hear her footsteps as she rushes off down the stairs.

"You don't like Ester?" I ask Ivy, and she looks at me before shaking her head.

"No, she is fine. I just don't know her very well," Ivy answers when the guard clears his throat. I glance at him. So does Ivy, and he nods to her. Clearly, something is going on I'm unaware of.

I will have to find out when we get back, but something tells me she is lying. And that doesn't sit well with me, and if she keeps it up, she will learn, one way or another, not to do it again.

"Ivy..."

She looks up at me. My jaw clenches, and I take a deep breath. I can feel my temper rising. "Do I need to do something about Ester?" I ask her, and she gasps.

Her eyes widen, and she shakes her head. "No, no. She's done nothing wrong," she blurts out, but I hear the way her heart sputters at my question. My eyes go to the guard over her shoulder, and he clenches his jaw.

I don't like being lied to, and it's a trait that I won't tolerate. She'll learn dishonesty has consequences if she keeps it up.