

Chapter 46

IVY

"Ivy, wake up. We are here."

I groan, turning my face into his chest before feeling my cheek and lips become wet. I sit up, startled, and look at him before looking at his shirt, which is covered in drool. My eyes widen and my face heats with embarrassment. The warm sunlight filters through the car window, casting a golden glow on his features.

"Yes, I may have gone somewhat overboard with the calling, but you kept complaining your stomach hurts," he says, unclipping the seat belt.

He leans forward, tugs his shirt off, and reaches for a hand towel to wipe his chest. I blink before finding my fingers brushing through the hair on his chest. The King stops, glancing at me, yet my eyes are on his chest.

"Ivy?" he murmurs, gripping my chin and tilting my face up to his. He tilts his head to the side, watching me for a second, his eyes crinkling with worry. He pries open my upper lip, only to hiss when his thumb catches on teeth that feel much too sharp suddenly. Yet the taste of his blood washing over my tongue awakens something. I bite into one of

his pecs and then his collarbone. I shake my head, I don't even remember moving; I just did it.

The King hisses when my teeth break his skin, and I don't know what comes over me. Some possessive urge to claim him takes over, making me turn into a savage. Blood runs down his chest, and the car door opens. The cool mountain air breezes through the open door, mingling with wildflowers and pine scents.

"Close it." His tone is commanding and powerful, sending a shiver down my spine while I blubber out an apology.

"It's fine, my love," he says, gripping my face. His touch is tender and reassuring despite the circumstances. He looks down at his chest before prying my lips apart, examining my teeth, and I bite down on his finger. He groans and presses his lips together while I try to unlatch my jaw. What is wrong with me? He probably thinks I'm some freak.

His blood runs across my tongue, a feral growl escapes me. My teeth let his finger go, but before I can stop myself or even think about it, my teeth sink into his shoulder. The door opens again, and the King growls menacingly.

"Next one to open that fucking door will lose a hand. Close it."

Tears burn my vision as instincts I'm not used to take over. I have no control over my actions, and it's humiliating. The salty taste of my tears

mixes with the coppery tang of his blood, and I bite my own tongue to stop from attacking him, but it does not work.

The door shuts quickly, the sound making my senses kick in. I am mortified. By the time I finish attacking the King, I think he has probably 20 bite marks across his chest and shoulders. He just let me do it – just took it, which horrifies me even more.

"Shh, stop crying, Ivy. It's fine. It's not your fault; it's mine." Is he nuts? He didn't ask me to do it.

"As I said before, I went overboard with the calling. It can make you react oddly, possessively, because it strengthens the... It strengthens your instincts. It's fine. You didn't hurt me," he says, wiping away my tears. My face is scorching with shame.

"Stop; I'm okay. You haven't hurt me," Kyson repeats soothingly. Leaning forward, he retrieves the hand towel, cleaning up the blood. I take the towel from him, wiping it off. The indents of my teeth that litter his chest. I won't be surprised if he muzzles me after this. I would deserve it.

"I didn't mean to," I cry, and he clutches my face in his hands. His thumbs pry my eyelids open.

"We need to get your files from the orphanage. Your pupils are over-dilated," he says, looking at me with deep concern. His piercing gaze searches mine.

"Huh?"

"Your eyes are changing, and your teeth have come through more. I think you're wrong about your birthday. Your pupils usually dilate days before your shift, not weeks," Kyson explains.

How could I have my birthday wrong? How could my mother?

"We should get this over with. I want to get you back home," he says while tossing the bloody hand towel onto the seat.

"Come on, let's go see the castle," he says, sliding me off his lap beside him and sliding across the seat. I grab his hand as he reaches for the door handle.

"They will see." I cringe at the thought of them seeing what I did to him. The King sits back in his seat and sighs and I watch his eyes glaze over. Someone taps on the window a few moments later, and I jump.

"It's just Damian," he whispers, and the door opens. The King takes the shirt from him. Damian closes the door while Kyson pulls it on. Even with the shirt, I can still see some of the marks I left on him.

Once he has his shirt on, the King reaches for me and kisses me before nibbling on my lips. "This place is amazing. I can't wait for you to see it," the King says while pushing the door open.

He steps out onto a quartz-covered driveway. I follow and find we are deep within the tall, peaking mountains. The breathtaking view of the snow-capped peaks, and the verdant valley below instills awe in me. Tall sandstone walls surround the place, with blooming rose vines climbing them. The castle is easily two times the size of the Ling's palace, it even has watchtowers. The stone it is made of is covered in flowering vines and moss, and it looks like a castle from some magical fairytale.

A massive Lycan statue stands in the center of the driveway. It has a crown on its head, and the gates leading to the place are huge. I can just see the small town outside its gates. Though it is a ghost town, everything is well-maintained and picturesque.

Yet I swear I have dreamed of this place, maybe even seen it before. I can't explain the feeling this place churns within me, but it is like a sense of déjà vu has washed over me. I shake the feeling off.

"Sir, we will go to the quarters and recheck the old murder scene. Some scouts are also heading to the river to secure it," Damian says, and Kyson nods. Murder scene? Why would it still be the same? I think.

The King shows me around the outside of the castle before taking me inside. Inside everything is made of marble, even the stairs. Huge crystal chandeliers hang from the roof, sparkling like stars in the dimly lit hallway. Their reflections dance on the polished marble floors, making the floor glitter. The walls are adorned with intricate tapestries and paintings, each telling a story of its own.

The place becomes even more exquisite as we walk around, yet that nagging feeling returns. I can't help but marvel at the attention to detail and the beauty of it all. It feels like stepping into a dream, one that I can't quite remember but this place feels familiar. I shake the ridiculous thought out of my head.

"So, how old do you think the Queen's daughter would have been?" I ask, my voice echoing slightly in the vast halls.

"Probably around your age, maybe a little older or younger. We couldn't determine her age. The King and Queen went to extensive lengths to keep her hidden," Kyson answers. "Though some of the Landeena guards that survived estimated her to be four at the time of the attack, so if true, she would be nearly 18."

"If she was hidden, how do you know the baby was a girl?"

"All the baby items we found were pink, and so was the crib, plus her name was etched into her bed. As I said, a few guards..." I stop in the foyer when I notice some of his men waiting to speak to him. Their expressions are serious and somber, a stark contrast to the extravagance surrounding us.

The men exchange a few words with the King, their voices low and hushed. Kyson's face remains expressionless, but I can sense tension radiating off him. Something about whatever they're talking about has him on edge, and I can't help but feel a creeping sense of unease as well.

As we continue to explore the castle, I find myself constantly looking over my shoulder, expecting something to jump out of the shadows, but the only thing behind us is the guards trailing us.

We eventually reach a set of large, ornate double doors, which Kyson pushes open to reveal a breathtaking library. Towering shelves filled with books and scrolls line the walls, and a beautiful stained-glass window casts a rainbow of colors onto the polished floor.

"This was the Queen's favorite room," Kyson explains. "She spent most of her time here studying and reading."

"Did you know the Queen well?" I ask. Kyson shakes his head.

"No, I was familiar with her from the trials between kingdoms, but do you really know anybody? Let alone a Queen in a rival kingdom?" he asks. He has a point.

"So, how do you know she spent most of her time here?"

"Cedric, he was one of her guards and now lives in my Kingdom. A few of her personal guards lived, although a lot of the time, I get this bizarre sense they wished they had died when Landeena fell," he tells me, and my brows furrow.

As we make our way back through the castle, the sense of déjà vu becomes even more pronounced. It's as if I'm walking through a memory, one that I can't quite grasp but feel inexplicably drawn to. The castle's beauty and mystery captivate me when I see guards stop in our path.