

Chapter 49

ABBIE

"You didn't take your presents," he states, his voice gentle yet firm as he walks me to his room. The air between us is heavy with anticipation, and I can't help but chew my lip nervously. I glance up at him, and I'm met with his piercing gaze. He sighs, his breath warm against my skin as he pushes his door open, revealing the gifts he bought me, still sitting untouched in the center of his bed.

"Did you not like them? Are they the wrong ones?" he asks me, his eyes filled with concern. I'm struck by the earnestness in his voice, and I quickly shake my head.

"I can change them," he offers, his tone gentle and reassuring.

"No, no, it's not that, I just...you shouldn't," I suck in a breath when Liam waltzes into the room, his footsteps light and graceful as he falls onto Gannon's bed. He props his arm behind his head and smiles slyly, an impish glint in his eyes. Gannon shakes his head at him but turns back to face me.

"What is it, Abbie?" Gannon asks, his eyes searching mine for the answer. I tear my gaze from Liam, my heart racing as I try to find the words.

"You shouldn't buy gifts for a servant, Gamma," I tell him, using his title since Liam was around.

"Gannon, not Gamma. You don't address me by title. We have been over this. And why can't I, Abbie?"

"Because it is wrong," I tell him, feeling the weight of their stares on me. He looks at me as if I am absurd, his brow furrowing in confusion.

"Wrong, how?" he asks, his voice soft and patient. I feel Liam's eyes on the side of my face, his presence adding to the tension in the room and making me even more nervous as he watches us.

"It's just a gift," Liam chimes in, his voice light and teasing.

"Yes, but servants don't get gifts, not for free," I tell him, my voice wavering slightly.

"What do you mean? That is what a gift is, or have I been doing gifts wrong all this time? Gannon? I don't understand this one; I bought Dustin some boxers with my face on them the other day. Maybe I should have asked for something in return," he chuckles, his laughter filling the room like a warm embrace.

"Liam, give me a moment, geez, go annoy Dustin," Gannon says, his voice firm but not unkind.

"Gladly, I might be able to con him to suck my dick," Liam says, sending me a wink. I cringe at his vulgar words, feeling a blush creep up my cheeks. Liam gets up and pats Gannon on the back as he passes.

"Don't forget you leave early tomorrow," Liam reminds him.

"And yes, I can cover your shift if you want to spend time with Abbie," he calls over his shoulder as he walks out, leaving Gannon and me alone in the room.

Gannon turns his attention back to the presents he bought, sitting on the edge of the bed. The soft rustling of the bags seems to fill the room, and I can't help but watch him, his every movement deliberate and graceful. He reaches over and grips my hand, his touch warm and comforting. "Dustin told me earlier that Ivy told you the King wants to change her and make her his mate?" Gannon says, his voice low and serious. I nod, my stomach twisting with a mixture of fear and excitement at the thought.

"What if I said I wanted to do the same with you?" I can't help but chuckle at his question, my laughter tinged with nervous energy.

"You barely know me," I respond, attempting to hide the uncertainty in my voice.

"And the King barely knows Ivy, Abbie. It is no different, not really anyway," Gannon counters, his tone soft and persuasive.

"But what if you find your mate?"

"I won't and it wouldn't matter even if I did."

"Why would you want me, though?" I ask, my heart pounding in my chest at the unexpected revelation. He scratches the back of his neck nervously, his eyes locked on mine.

"Because I like you. Why else?" he says, a hint of vulnerability creeping into his voice.

"Liking someone and loving them are two different things."

"We could learn to love each other, Abbie. We would have all the time in the world," he says, reaching forward and tugging me between his legs. He wraps his arms around my waist and looks at me intently. Even sitting face to face, his height is imposing.

"Will you think about it?" he asks, his voice a gentle whisper. I chew my lip, my mind racing. Ivy did tell me Gannon would change me and I did like him, but the thought of taking such a leap is daunting.

"But what if I find my mate?" I ask him, my voice barely audible. He sighs, a hint of sadness in his eyes.

"Well, I am hoping you don't, but if you did, and you wanted to be with them, I would let you go if that is what you wanted." I nod, my heart aching at the thought of leaving Gannon behind. He lets me go, turning back to the bags filled with presents.

"Please take your gifts, Abbie. I got them for you, and I expect nothing in return. I just wanted to see you smile," he says, his voice warm and sincere. I can't help but smile at his words, my cheeks heating when he reaches up, brushing my cheek with his hand.

"There it is," he says, a gentle smile playing on his lips before cupping my face in his hand.

"I have to go with the King tomorrow to your old pack," he says, switching the subject.

"You're going back?" I ask him, my voice thick with emotion. He nods, his eyes filled with determination.

"I have a bit of a strange request to ask, and you can say no if you like," he says, his voice tentative. My brows furrow, curiosity piqued.

"What is it?"

"Can I count how many lashes are on your back? The King wanted to know. He counted Ivy's while she slept, but he wants to punish Mrs.

Daley, and he needs to know what charges to bring against her," Gannon tells me, his voice laced with anger.

"He wants to punish Mrs. Daley?" I ask, shock registering in my voice. She has always been this figure who I believed could never be punished.

"You and Ivy never should have been treated like that. I have counted the ones on the back of your legs," he says, looking away as if he did something wrong.

"But can I count the ones on your back, as I said you can say no?"

I swallow hard. It's not like he hasn't seen my back before or my butt. I chew my lip, considering his request.

"You just want to count them, that's it?" I ask, my voice wavering yet trusting Gannon.

"That is all, Abbie," he says, sincerity shining in his eyes. The thought of Mrs. Daley being held accountable for her actions is thrilling, and despite my reservations, I nod my head.

Gannon taps my thighs, gets up, closes the door, and returns to sit on the bed. Turning around, I unbutton my dress before pulling my arms out and only leaving my waist covered. Gannon pulls me to sit between my legs, and I feel his fingers tracing my skin gently. His touch sends

shivers down my spine, and my face flushes when I feel his lips press tenderly against my shoulder.

"Thank you, Abbie," he whispers, and I turn my face to look at him. He helps me pull my arms back into my dress before turning me as I stand to help me with the buttons. When I do up the last one, his hand bunches my dress on my hip as he tugs me closer.

"I promise she will be punished," he whispers, and I nod. Any punishment was good enough for me. She needed to know the error of her ways, and I wished death upon her. What she let the butcher do would forever haunt me; bruises and lashes heal, yet what he did scarred my mind, and she allowed it. Tainted my dreams and haunted my soul.

"Can you check on the kids?"

"I can try if the King allows it. We will be in a time crunch. The King wants to get back so he can change Ivy and take her as his mate," he tells me, and I sigh. I would love to know how my Tyson is, but if the King was genuinely going to punish her, maybe that would make her change her ways.

"What's wrong?" Gannon asks, genuine concern in his voice.

"Nothing, I just worry about the children, especially the younger ones," I admit. Gannon brushes his knuckles across my cheek, his touch gentle and reassuring.

"Maybe one day I can take you back to see them," he says, and I smile, hope kindling in my heart.

"Really?" I ask before my smile fades. What if I run into the butcher? Panic begins to rise within me. I can't go back. What if he takes me, keeps me like he always said he would?

"If that is what you want," Gannon says, his voice steady and supportive. My skin itches at the thought of the butcher, and I scratch the back of my neck, only for Gannon to capture my hand.

"One day, you will tell me what makes you so nervous," he says, his eyes searching mine as he kisses my fingers.

"Maybe one day," I tell him, a soft smile playing on my lips as he tilts his head to the side, observing me. I observe him back when he leans in, and I hold my breath, wondering what he will do when his lips brush mine softly. I gasp at the sensation, and he tugs me closer, yet he doesn't deepen the kiss or press for more. When he goes to pull away, I gather my courage. It's just a kiss, I tell myself, trying to remind myself that I like Gannon.

So I kiss him back. I feel him smile against my lips before feeling his tongue sweep across my bottom lip, not forcibly. He is seeing if I would invite him in, and I do. My lips part when his hand moves to the nape of my neck. His fingers massage the back of my neck before tangling

in my hair. His tongue brushes mine, and his taste overwhelms me as I kiss him back.

When I eventually pull away from him, he sucks on my bottom lip but allows me space, and my face flames at what I let him do. Yet I like kissing him, and he appears to like it too because he smiles at me before pecking my cheek.

"I have work to do, but can I come to see you later?" he asks, and I nod, my heart pounding in my chest as I wonder if more kissing would be involved. I turn to walk out when he grabs my hand and tugs me back. He nods to my presents.

"Draw me something," he says, his voice gentle and expectant. I chew the inside of my lip, feeling a mix of excitement and nervousness. I nod, accepting the gift before rushing out, and I hear him chuckle as I close the door. I race back to my room and shut the door, hearing him leave a few moments later.

As I settle down in my room, I open the gifts Gannon had given me. The art supplies he had chosen were of excellent quality, making me appreciate his thoughtfulness even more. I let my fingers glide over the smooth, cold surface of the sketchpad, feeling the potential of the empty pages, waiting to be filled with my thoughts and emotions.

I take a deep breath and start drawing, something I haven't done in ages. The world around me fades away, leaving only the scratching sound of the pencil on paper. My hand moves with a life of its own, guided by

my heart and memories, and I find myself pouring all of my feelings and experiences onto the paper.

Time seems to stand still as I work on the drawing, completely immersed in the process. It wasn't until I put the finishing touches on the piece that I realize how much time had passed. I take a step back to look at one of my creations, a mix of nervousness and vulnerability fills my chest.

The drawing depicts Gannon and me standing under a tree, our fingers intertwined. The sun filters through the leaves, casting a warm golden light over us. Our expressions convey happiness, and I can't help but feel a twinge of longing for the future we might have together. But that nagging voice reminds me. I am a rogue; he will see that, turn me away, and toss me aside. Rogues don't deserve kindness. I was about to tear the paper up when I hear footsteps approaching my door; I quickly hide the drawing in my sketchpad and turn to face the door. Gannon walks in, his eyes sparkling with anticipation. "Did you draw something?" he asks, his voice filled with curiosity and excitement. I chew my lip, and he tilts his head to the side. His eyes go to my fingers and the pastels that cover them.

"Will you show me?" he asks.

I hesitate for a moment, feeling vulnerable as I hand him the sketchpad. He flips through the pages until he finds the drawing I just completed. His eyes widen as he takes in the image before him, and I watch as a slow smile spreads across his face.

"This is beautiful, Abbie," he says softly, his voice filled with emotion.

"Thank you." He carefully closes the sketchpad and hands it back to me, his eyes never leaving mine.

As we stand there, our hands touching, I can't help but feel hope and warmth in my heart.