

Chapter 50

IVY

The guard led me to the other side of the castle, his footsteps echoing softly on the stone floor. The guard is tall and muscular, with a chiseled jawline and short black hair. He wears a black uniform that is perfectly tailored to fit his body, the same uniform most of the guards wear, complete with polished black boots and a silver and gold emblem on his chest, indicating he is one of the king's main guards. His eyes are a deep blue-gray, and they seem to be able to look right through me whenever he glances my way.

Sighing, I turn my attention back to where we are going, and I can't help but notice the way the sunlight filters through the tall, narrow windows, casting intricate patterns on the walls. "What is your name?" I ask him, curious about the silent figure who is always by my side or standing in the halls wherever I go. He glances at me, his eyes guarded, but says nothing.

"Come on, you follow me everywhere. I feel weird not knowing it," I admit, trying to put him at ease with a small smile. There was something about his presence that felt comforting, even though he remained so stoic.

"Dustin, my Queen," he says finally, his voice deep and steady. I scrunch up my face at his words, feeling the weight of the title pressing down on me.

"Please don't call me that. It sounds wrong, given I am a rogue," I protest, the idea of being Queen, still feeling so foreign and strange.

"But you will be," he reminds me, his expression unreadable.

"Even then, I don't think I want to be called that," I admit.

"It cannot be helped; it will be your title," he says simply, his gaze never wavering from the path ahead.

I yawn as I climb the stairs, my legs feeling heavy from exhaustion. The castle is a maze of corridors, with seemingly endless rooms hidden behind intricately carved wooden doors. I stop halfway down the corridor when I notice the forbidden door slightly ajar. Stepping closer, curiosity getting the better of me, I peer inside and see that it appears to be a baby's room. The soft colors and the gently rocking crib evoke a feeling of innocence and warmth, making me wonder about the story behind the room and why it is in the King's quarters.

"Miss Ivy, I don't think you should go in there," Dustin whispers, his voice filled with concern. I went to step away, heeding his warning, just as the King turns the corner into the hall. The King's face is a mask of fury, his eyes blazing, and his lips pressed into a thin line. His body is tense, and his hands are clenched into fists. He is clearly angry, and his

presence is intimidating. His eyes, sharp, immediately dart to the door as I step back from it, my heart pounding in my chest.

"What do you think you're doing?" he snaps, his voice like a whip, becoming enraged.

"Nothing, I was..." I stutter, my words failing me under the weight of his anger.

He strides over, his face a storm of emotions, and he shuts the door with so much force it makes me jump. Then he points at me angrily, his eyes blazing, making me step back from him. "You do not go in there, ever," he snarls, and I shrink away from his abrupt anger, feeling like a scolded child, the King goes to grab my arm when Dustin grips his wrist and steps between us. Kyson bumps into him, and my heart sputters in my chest that he just grabbed the King. Kyson tilts his head to the side, his eyes flicker sadistically at his guard interfering, and I am just as shocked to see the guard step between me and his King, I find the notion odd that he would defend me against his King.

"My King, she was merely closing the door. The wind must have blown it open," Dustin interjects, his voice calm and steady. The King looks at him, his anger momentarily halted, and Dustin lets his wrist go.

"I should have closed the door, my King. MY Queen is not to be blamed," Dustin states, emphasizing the word Queen oddly like to him; it meant something else entirely.

The guard nods toward an open window I hadn't noticed, its curtains billowing gently in the breeze. Kyson's eyes flick to me and then to Dustin, who still stands between us. "Very well," Kyson states. Dustin nods once. King Kyson looks at me, his expression softening ever so slightly, and I quickly nod, going along with Dustin's story, thankful he saved me. I wasn't going to go in there; I just peeked inside.

"You may stand down, Dustin," Kyson tells him, making my brows furrow in confusion. Dustin swiftly steps aside, and I glance between them, but Dustin gives nothing away, his eyes straight ahead, staring at the wall.

The King sighs, the anger dissipating from his face, replaced by a weariness that made him seem more human.

"I apologize, Ivy. That room is just off-limits. I shouldn't have snapped at you," he says, scrubbing a hand down his face as if trying to erase the stress of the moment. Kyson places his hand on my lower back, the warmth of his touch seeping through my clothes, and leads me to the bedroom. I glance over my shoulder at the guard, who nods to me in understanding.