

Chapter 51

KYSON

The guilt I feel for snapping at her is horrendous, gnawing at the pit of my stomach like a ravenous beast. I hated myself for it; the way she shrank back made it all the more terrible. I couldn't erase the fear on her face from my outburst from my mind, like a haunting image that threatened to stay with me forever.

My instincts were all over the place, a whirlwind of emotions I struggled to contain. The anniversary of my sister's death loomed heavily over me, casting a dark shadow on my thoughts. Then Ivy's birthday was obviously looming, and her attitude, as well as fighting, and my own instincts were becoming too much to bear. Although it's not her fault, she's temperamental these days. I can't blame her, though; I am too even at the best of times. She doesn't understand what is happening, whereas I do, since I have shifted and seen many werewolves shift over the decades.

The closer she gets, the more animalistic she will become before finally shifting. With me being so close, it only enhances those instincts and makes her urges so much more intense as her body and brain try to process that I am her mate. The air between us is thick with tension, and I can feel the magnetic pull of our connection growing stronger each day.

I run my hand down her spine. She shivers as she sleeps on my chest. The scent of her hair, a mixture of wildflowers and the faintest hint of vanilla fills my senses as I breathe her in. Ivy had whined and growled earlier, complaining that I kept putting her to sleep. But the more she sleeps, the better her transition will be when she shifts.

Our bond is strong, and I can tell that it's almost forged. I knew when she shifts that she will recognize me as her mate instantly, maybe even beforehand. The thought of our bond becoming complete fills me with an anticipation that is both thrilling and terrifying.

A knock at the door pulls me from my thoughts. I had enjoyed the quiet and reveled in the feel of her body pressed against mine, her soft skin a balm to my frayed nerves. So the knock annoyed me, an unwelcome intrusion into our peaceful cocoon. The door cracks open, and Damian walks in before sitting down in the armchair. His tall, muscular frame is draped in casual clothes, his dark hair disheveled as if he'd been running his fingers through it.

"Turn away for a second," I tell him, my voice firm. He obliges, turning his gaze to my bookshelf. Its rows of leather-bound tomes cast in the warm glow of the room's soft lighting. I roll Ivy onto her back before covering her naked body with the blanket, tucking it under her chin. She whimpers, so I jam my pillow next to her face. I watch as she buries her nose in it while Damian chuckles softly, his deep voice like a comforting hum in the air.

"I see the bond has formed. I think she will wake up and recognize you soon enough," he observes, his eyes flickering between Ivy and me.

"Yes," I tell him, emerging from the bed. Damian looks at my arms and chest that are covered in her bite marks. She even bit me three times while she was asleep. This marks shows our growing connection, a reminder of the fire that burns between us.

"Definitely almost forged," he laughs as I sit down across from him, his eyes twinkling with amusement.

"Why the drop-in? It's nearly 1 am," I inquire, my brows furrowing in curiosity.

"Have you slept?" he asks, eyeing me with a mix of concern and skepticism.

"What do you think?" I retort, feeling the weight of exhaustion bearing down on me.

He shakes his head. "Kyson, you have to sleep."

"You don't think I've tried," I say, scrubbing a hand down my face, feeling the rough stubble that has grown since my last shave.

"It can wait until you do," he says, hopping up from his seat.

"No, tell me. It must be important," I insist, my voice tinged with impatience as I look back at him.

He glances at Ivy on the bed before clearing his throat awkwardly. My brows furrow, and he nods toward her, keeping his gaze on me. I look over to find she had kicked the blankets off. I get up and quickly recover her before returning, only for her to kick them off again. The rhythmic sound of her breathing fills the room, a soothing lullaby that threatens to lull me into slumber as well.

Damian turns his seat to face the wall, hearing the ruffle of blankets as she overheats. "You have a thing for her being naked," he laughs, the corners of his eyes crinkling with amusement.

"I like the feel of her skin. It keeps my Lycan side calm," I explain, my voice taking on a defensive edge.

"So, you haven't shifted?" Damian asks, his tone serious now. Usually around the anniversary, I am almost permanently stuck in my Lycan form, ruled by emotion.

"Not because of the anniversary, though I lost my temper earlier. I thought she went into..." I stop, the words catching in my throat. I can't even bring myself to admit what the room was for.

"Dustin told me," Damian says, his voice gentle as he tries to offer comfort. I nod my head and swallow guiltily.

"Well, as long as you're in control, I suppose I will tell you," he says, brushing his fingers through his hair, a nervous habit he's had since we were children.

"We spoke to Alpha Dean. His son, Brock, wasn't very helpful. Anyway, Alpha Dean is still trying to find the rest of the information from the night Ivy and Abbie were brought in, and you were right about her being ready for her shift. Her birthday is in two days," he reveals, his voice steady and informative.

I nod. That made more sense. "So why is that an issue? If anything, that is good news," I tell him, glad I didn't have to wait weeks.

"Alpha Dean asked for us to come to see him. He wants to be sure and has asked for some files to be sent over. He wants to know if we can come to visit him today."

"What for?" I ask, concern creeping into my voice.

"He wouldn't say, just said it was important, and it is to do with Ivy," Damian answers, his eyes searching mine for a reaction.

I glance over at her sleepy, peaceful form. "When are we leaving?"

"At noon, the men need sleep before we move out."

I nod and rub my chin, wondering what Alpha Dean could have to say that he wouldn't say it over the phone.

"I am not sure Ivy will want to go back there just yet," I admit, glancing at her. "And I don't want her to fall back into old habits," I tell my Beta, concern etched into my features.

"Gannon can stay, or I will. I will assign extra guards to her."

"I would rather you remain with her," I decide, trusting Damian more than anyone else.

"Very well, I will. Try to get some sleep, Kyson," Damian says before getting up and leaving the room. The door closes with a soft click, leaving me alone with my thoughts and the steady rhythm of Ivy's breathing.

Worry gnaws at me as I get to my feet and walk over to my bar. Grabbing the bottle of whiskey off the shelf, I go to pour a glass before deciding to drink straight from the bottle when I see only a quarter of the bottle is left. The liquid warmth spreads through my chest, dulling the edges of my anxiety for a moment.

Ivy moves on the bed, tossing the blanket off and bunching it between her legs. I can't help but think about how I can't wait until she starts nesting and destroying the sheets. Nesting she-wolves become

territorial, and I'm not even sure she'll allow Damian and Gannon in here when that time comes.

Judging by the way she's bunching the sheets now, it won't be too far off. She'll make this her haven, and once I make her a Lycan, she will kill anyone who enters her den. The memory of my sister accidentally killing her handmaiden when she started nesting surfaces in my mind, a painful reminder of the dangers that come with this stage. She felt terrible, but I would ensure that didn't happen with Ivy.

I bring the bottle to my lips and take another swig, enjoying the smooth, sweet taste while my eyes trail over Ivy. Her pink, bare form is on full display as she lies on her stomach with her leg bent. My cock twitches, and I can't wait to bury it in her, but I will wait and let her decide. So until she asks, I will endure it.

Walking over to the bed, I place my whiskey bottle on the bedside table. My hand skims up the inside of her leg from her ankle, brushing between the apex of her legs. A smile splits onto my face as she moans softly, pushing back against my hand. Leaning over the bed, I plant a gentle kiss on her naked shoulder, but before nipping at her jaw, she groans.

The sound sends a shiver down my spine, and I can't help but be entranced by her every movement. The room is bathed in the soft glow of moonlight streaming through the window, casting delicate shadows across her skin. The scent of her arousal fills the air, a heady mix of sweet and musky that threatens to overwhelm my senses.

Despite the urgency of our impending visit to Alpha Dean and the lingering sense of guilt from earlier, I can't tear my eyes away from Ivy. As I watch her sleep, a fierce protectiveness wells up within me as I move toward her.