

Chapter 8

IVY

Clarice looks uncertain as she glances between the King and me before turning to face us. She gives me a sad smile. Abbie is still frozen beside me.

“Abbie, please get changed, dear,” she says softly, motioning toward the changing room, and I swallow the bile that rises in my throat when she rushes off.

My cheeks heat under the intensity of his gaze, horrified that he expects me to strip before him.

“Forgive me, my King, but is there a reason you have requested her to change in front of you?” Clarice questions gently. I worry about her questioning him over me. However, she does not fear speaking out against him. Which I find odd.

“She lied to my Gamma,” he answers her while I try to figure out what lie I spoke.

“Now change, Ivy. Remove your clothes,” the King orders, and his aura hits me, causing goosebumps to form on my arms. “I’m not going to ask again.”

I don't understand why I am being punished this way. It makes no sense. If he would just explain, I could apologize, yet I have no clue what I should apologize for other than touching him. His sudden anger makes no sense to me.

I glance at Clarice, and she nods, telling me to do what he asked and motioning for me to remove my clothes. The quiver of my lips can't be helped as it dawns on me that he is seriously going to watch me get changed. My fingers tremble as I try to undo the buttons. My hands tremble as I pop the first button on my blouse, my eyes filling with tears.

“Please, sir,” I murmur, even though I know I shouldn’t talk out of turn, but this is dehumanizing. If it were Clarice, it wouldn’t bother me. She is a woman. But stripping off my clothes in front of a man, a King no less, makes me feel sick.

“Quiet. Remove them,” he says, leaving no room for disagreement when a male servant walks in behind him.

“Out!” the King bellows at the man; he rushes off, and Clarice rushes over, shutting the door so no one else walks in. She stands in front of it like she is keeping guard and nods for me to proceed.

“Do I need to come over and undress you?” he asks, clearly running out of patience. Clarice glances at him nervously, then waves at me to hurry. I shake my head, quickly poking the buttons through the holes as I try to turn away from him to shield myself. My bra is so thin it is almost see-through, and my breathing is heavy as panic sets in.

“This is taking too long,” the King snaps, storming over to me and appearing behind me. He grips my blouse and yanks it off me. I shriek in pain at the tearing fabric and also out of fear. I quickly cover myself with my hands when the King inhales a sharp breath. He growls low and deep in the back of his throat. The sound is menacing and threatening.

The deep, rough sound causes goosebumps across my entire body. My entire body sways under his aura, and Clarice looks like she is about to faint at the King’s actions when he touches me. A filthy rogue. Or is she genuinely worried about me? Either way, she steps in quickly to distract the King, for which I am thankful.

“Sir, I can do that,” I hear her say when I suddenly feel his fingers run down my back, over my scar-ravaged skin, and over the bandage wrapped around my torso and lower back where the newest wounds lie.

His fingers brush over the markings that the bandages can’t cover entirely—they are too high up my back. Abbie wrapped them around my body as best she could. The bandages are so tight it is a little hard to breathe. Frozen with my fear, my face heats as blood rushes to it. I am mortified.

“Turn around,” he says. His voice is suddenly softer. However, I shake my head, embarrassed by the situation I am in. I have never been naked in front of anyone except Abbie and Mrs. Daley. It wasn’t enough to remove my blouse. Now he wants me to face him?

His hands fall on my shaking shoulders, and his breath sweeps across my neck. “Please turn around, Ivy,” he whispers, turning me slowly. I clench my eyes shut, not wanting to see the disgust on his face when his hand cups my cheek, wiping a stray tear.

I’m used to people shuddering at the sight of a rogue, but for unknown reasons, I can’t handle seeing that disgust on him. I curse myself for letting tears fall, knowing the punishment for such a transgression is usually the most horrific of them all.

Mrs. Daley could be unforgiving if we shed a tear—telling us tears wouldn’t help us—she was right. They never did. They always made our punishments harsher when she would beat us for them.

“Put your arms down.”

“Please, sir, my bra is see-through,” I whisper, still refusing to open my eyes, hugging myself tighter. Suddenly, I feel his chest brush my hands. His hands slide up my arms, and my eyes fly open at his touch. He leans down, his stubble brushing my cheek.

“Use your hands; I just need your arms out of the way,” he whispers, and I nod as his hands slide down my arms to grip my wrists, moving them so I cup my breasts with my hands.

I watch him fiddling with the bandages, his eyes moving to mine when he catches me watching him warily. "I won't hurt you," he murmurs, then unwraps them. My entire body trembles when I hear the door to the room Abbie was in open. Her gasp is clearly audible throughout the room.

My head turns at the noise, and she rushes forward, drops to her knees, and begs for me at his feet. “Please, she didn’t mean it! She will be good! It startled her! I will take her punishment; just leave her be. Please, I beg you!” Abbie sobs.

The King stops, looking down at her like he thinks she is absurd.

“What are you talking about?” he asks her. When she doesn't answer, he looks at Clarice.

"Who is punishing whom?" he snaps at her, and she and the King look at me in unison.

His face is so close my breath lodges in my throat. My face heats as I stare at his silver eyes, framed by thick dark lashes, stubble creating shadows across his face, and full lips. He is gorgeous despite my fears.

“What is she talking about?” he demands, using his Alpha aura just enough not to cause me pain, yet I feel the tingle of his authority roll over me. I feel like bearing my neck to him so he doesn't think I am being deliberately defiant; I just don't know what he is asking or why.

“She said she would take the punishment, but it's fine, Abbie. You did nothing wrong,” I tell her, and Abbie shakes her head.

“Why would I punish her?” he asks Abbie, looking genuinely confused.

“Because she cried out. She didn't mean it, I swear. We know not to make noise; she just didn't know the Beta would touch her back. Please,” Abbie begs.

The King rubs his temples, looking frustrated and exhausted suddenly.

“Clarice, can you please explain what they are talking about?” he asks, pinching the bridge of his nose and squeezing his eyes shut tight.

“I think they are referring to being punished for reacting to pain?” Clarice says, looking at us, and Abbie nods to her.

He blinks like he is confused, and I look at Abbie, just as confused by his question. The King finally shakes his head and lets out a breath. Without saying a word, he peels off the bandages. When they fall away, he asks me to turn.

I do as he asks and brace myself for the lashings I know will come. Clarice gasps. Abbie whimpers, her fingers brushing my ankle as a reminder she is here with me.

“Who did this?” the King demands. I glance down at Abbie, who stares up at me from the floor with fear on her face.

"Rather than looking at each other, answer me—one of you now!" the King orders.

“Mrs. Daley,” we both say in unison.

“She whipped you!" The tone of his voice is appalled and laced with anger.

“Yes,” Abbie murmurs.

A person earns a day of solitude at the orphanage, sometimes for a week, for snitching or complaining. I learned early on when I told Mrs. Daley that Betty, Mrs. Daley’s best friend, had broken the vase, not Taylor.

Taylor was another rogue we met when we first arrived. She was hated just as much as any other rogue in the orphanage. Mrs. Daley locked me in a closet for a week after defending her. Abbie snuck me water, and Taylor was sentenced to death for it when I got out.

“How many times?” King Kyson demands.

“I only got three; Ivy got twenty-four for our misconduct,” Abbie answers.

“You must have done something terrible for this sort of punishment,” the King states.

We both nod and drop our heads guiltily.

“So, what did you do?” he prompts.

“I forgot to dust three window sills, and Ivy took half my punishment. We shared the sweeping, but Ivy took all the blame. So she got two for each room. There was simply not enough time. We had to meet the Alpha, or we would have done it properly,” Abbie explains in a rush.

“She whipped you over dust and un-swept floors?” he snarls. His reaction is so frightening we both jump, and I flinch away from the pure anger rushing off him as his aura erupts.

“Get some medicine and find some pain relief for me, Clarice,” he says, his hands settling on my ribs; the warmth of them sends tingles across my skin. I don’t move for fear of what will happen if I do. However, everything tells me a King should not touch a filthy rogue as low as me.

“Yes, sir,” Clarice says, rushing out the door.

“Is your back like this?” he asks Abbie.

“No, sir, mine didn’t break the skin,” she whispers.

“Will you please get up? Why are you at my feet?” he asks her, and she quickly rises, placing her hands behind her back and standing with a straight posture.

“Go... sit over there,” he tells her, waving her away. She hesitates but does as told.

Clarice comes back with fresh bandages, ointments, and a drink that smells strongly of herbs.

“Sir, I can do this; I am sure you don’t need to tend to a servant,” Clarice tells him.

“If I want help, I will ask for it; just hand me the ointment. Ivy, drink that; it will help with the pain,” he says.

Clarice passes the ointment to him and the glass to me. I sip it, and despite its horrid smell, I can taste mint in it, like it is supposed to remove the awful taste. His fingers are warm as he rubs the ointment

into the cuts. They sting, but his touch's tingling sensation is soothing, and I feel my back turning numb.

"Stay still for me," he says as he wraps the bandages around me quickly, his eyes looking me up and down. I feel like I'm on display, just like when I was back at the town square. He suddenly steps closer. I stare up at him with wide eyes as his chest presses against mine. His eyes flicker, turning a deep shade of black. His lips part, revealing sharp canines. I hold my breath when he grabs my hips. "My King?" Clarice speaks. He shakes his head and takes two steps away from me.

"Have either of you eaten?" he asks, and we both shake our heads. He nods, and Clarice speaks.

"I will organize their lunch. Where do you want to assign them, my King?" she asks while I quickly pull the maid's uniform on and start to button it. The King steps forward, and I flinch. He only helps button it up, his fingers replacing mine. Clarice watches, just as shocked as me that he would help a servant dress.

I remove my peasant skirt from under it when it is buttoned up and ball my clothes in my arms. Clarice comes over and takes them from me, tossing them in the bin.

"Ivy is to be my personal servant. She serves only me and remains in my quarters. Find somewhere for her friend Abbie that's close by. Maybe guard quarters?" he suggests. Clarice quickly nodded.

“Sir, what about your current servant?”

“Send her elsewhere; I want Ivy as my personal servant. If I find anyone else in my quarters besides Ivy, there will be hell to pay—only Ivy and no one else. As for Abbie, maybe see if Beta Damian needs a servant instead. Then she will be close if Ivy needs her, and the guards will watch over her. We should keep them both close while they settle in,” he says, quickly turning on his heel and walking out.

We all stare after him. Clarice shakes her head a couple of times.

“That was the strangest interaction,” she mutters to herself before turning to look at us.