

"Where are you going?" Damian asked, trying to figure out what was going on.

"To see my Queen," Gannon snapped, and I growled.

"Wait, just fucking wait until I know what's going on," Damian snarled at us both. Gannon growled but closed the door and folded his arms across his chest.

"Now, explain," Damian said.

"Marissa Talbot is Ivy's mother," I tell him.

"What?"

"The werewolf hunter, the one that killed my sister and the other Lycan bloodlines, her mother was the insider, she was the one that killed them," I growl. Just speaking that vile woman's name was like ingesting poison.

"That's what Alpha Dean had to tell you?" Damian gasped, looking between us while I wandered over to the bar to drown my sorrows and my guilt.

"Wait, that is why you sent her to the fucking stables, Kyson. For something her mother did?" Damian asked, outraged.

"He fucking said he would leave it, forget it; she is innocent. She didn't fucking kill your sister Kyson,"

"You think I don't know that?" I roared. This was so fucked up; I don't think I can be around her, not without the risk of hurting her.

"What about her father?"

"They are trying to figure out his link, but we believe it was her partner, but we also think he wasn't aware of the crimes bestowed on his wife, we found nothing on him, that's why we are late," Gannon explained.

"And you're sure it's her parents?" Damian asked, sitting down and rubbing both hands down his face. He looked just as defeated as I felt.

"He was supposed to show a picture to Ivy to make sure, but instead, I come up here and find out she has been taken to the fucking stables," Gannon growled.

"Gannon enough, it may not be right what he did but stop. Just let me think," Damian says. He knows better than anyone how much that woman haunted me. The horrors of finding my sister like that and what that woman did to her. How she could do that to another mother sickened me.

"Go, take a photo to Ivy, verify it is her mother," Damian says to Gannon, who nods and walks out. He was livid, but I had kicked her out long before my brain processed what I had done.

"Kyson, you could ruin her, ruin your only chance," Damian says, and I look away from him, not able to stand seeing him angry at me.

"I know," I tell him feeling sick to my stomach. I flexed my fingers which were still throbbing.

"Maybe you should go for a few days, getaway. I can bring Ivy back up here and watch her," Damian says, and I growl.

"I do not want her in this room," I snap at him, and he growls, shaking his head at me.

"Well, move fucking rooms, Kyson. It's depressing as fuck that you use your sister's old room and that shrine of a room you have across from the hall of all Azalea things. You need to get over it, move on," Damian snapped at me.

"What's done is done. Ivy has paid enough for her parents' sins. You don't need to punish her for them, too," Damian said, standing up. I know the horrors she has suffered very well, and now I was another one. Logically I knew that, but the burning hatred of what her parents did overshadowed the bond. I can't let this go.

"I get it I do, but you need to find a way to look past who her parents are because you hurt her. I am with Gannon, I will walk, and I know everyone else in this castle will walk for her too. You are not the only person that has waited for the Queen. This place has been a shrine for too long. We won't watch it go back to being a prison of your depression. Fix it, or you are on your own, my King,"

"She isn't of royal blood," I tell him.

"No, but she is our rightful Queen, the person destined to rule alongside you, you are our King, and we all took the same pact when you appointed us as your guard, that when the time came, we would protect our Queen over you, if that means choosing her over you so be it," Damian said before storming out.

My legs gave out the moment the door shut, I collapsed on the ground. My feet going from under me. I knew they were right. Knew I fucked up, yet I couldn't control my anger.

I promised to hurt them the same way they broke me but I had no idea that the person that would be taking that punishment would be my mate. Feeling for the mind-link, I felt for Gannon. He should be with Ivy by now.

He growled at me when it was opened but didn't try to shove me out.

"How is she?" I asked.

"How do you think? She is confused, and you broke her fucking hand,"

"It will heal when she shifts. The photo?" Gannon growls, and I could tell he didn't want to answer me.

"Gannon?"

"Yes, Marissa Talbot is her mother, but that doesn't mean she needs to pay for what her parents did, Kyson,"

"Just stay with her," I tell him.

"I was planning too. You think I will leave my Queen unguarded," I growled. She wasn't even marked yet, and my royal guard was choosing her over me.

"You really going to make her shift on her own?" Gannon asked.

"You're there," I tell him.

"Kyson, you fucking promised her," Gannon growls, and I really needed to remember not to tell them

so much.

"Kyson!"

"Tell me when she starts, and I will come down," I sigh, cutting off the link. I worried my lips between my teeth before getting up and grabbing a few bottles from the bar. It would be best if I was too drunk to shift if I was going down there. At least until I figured out what it was, I was doing.

Ivy POV

"Quick, sit down while I try to take care of your hand," Dustin said, dragging a cut in half wine barrel over. He flipped it, so I could sit on it. The other guard growled at him before gripping his shoulder.

"We were told to bring here, that is all," he snapped at Dustin. I looked at the man who stared at me like I was the scum over the earth, and I quickly averted my gaze.

"Remove your hand, Trey, or fucking lose it," Dustin snapped at him.

"I'm following orders, the King said to bring her here, and that was it,"

"Fuck the king," Dustin snapped, and the man went to take a step toward him when Gannon walked in.

"Yes, fuck the King, remember where your loyalties lie, Trey,"

"They lie with my King,"

"And she is your Queen," Gannon snarled at him, and the man whimpered before his eyes went to me.

"You haven't been here as long as the rest of us, but the King swore us all to choose his Queen over him,"

"If so, why is she down here, then?" The man demanded.

"Because the King is an idiot. Move Dustin. I will wrap her hand. Go fix up the old King's quarters for me," Gannon said, crouching down in front of me.

"Yes, Sir," Dustin says while Trey growled and Gannon glanced over his shoulder at him.

"You're off guard, get out of my face," Gannon ordered him, and I felt his aura rush out and Trey doubled over before rushing out.

Gannon set to work cleaning my hand and wrapping it. "It will heal once you shift. Do you think you can hold off a couple of hours?"

"Can't you heal it?" I asked. My hand was throbbing to its own beat, my fingers were black and purple, and fragmented bones pushed beneath my skin like splinters.

"I would if I could, but only the King can heal you. My saliva or blood won't work on you since you aren't mine," Gannon says, cupping my face with his hand. He pulls his phone out of his pocket. "Once the moon is at its highest peak, I will take you outside, so you can shift, my Queen," Gannon says.

"Please don't call me that," I murmur, looking away from him.

"I need to ask you something," Gannon says, unlocking his phone and scrolling through the pictures. He stops before turning his phone to me.

"Do you know this woman?" he asks, and I take the phone from him. A sob escapes from my lips when I realize it is my mother. I nod, tears trekking down my face.

"She's my mum," I smile sadly, brushing my thumb over the picture of her. What I would give to hear her voice again. She looked a little younger than I remembered in this picture, but I knew it was her. Gannon hangs his head and shakes it, and he sighs heavily before looking up at me.

"He will come around, Ivy. You just need to give him space." Gannon tells me.

"What do you mean? I don't get it. What did I do?" I ask. Gannon frowns when I see his eyes glaze over, and I could tell he was mind-linking. I waited for him to finish, and his eyes flickered before falling on me.

"You did nothing. It's what your mother did. She killed the King and Queen; she also killed the King's sister." I blink, astonished, unable to believe what I was hearing. That would be impossible. She couldn't have.

"Just try to get some rest. After your shift, I will take you to Kyson's old quarters,"

"But my birthday isn't for another couple of weeks," I tell him.

"The fact you recognized the King as your mate Ivy, shows your birthday is today," he says just as I hear someone curse. The stable doors opened, and hope bubbled in me. Thinking it was Kyson to tell me this was some sick joke, but it was just Clarice and Abbie. Clarice rubbed her elbow as if she had just banged it which would explain the curse that left her lips. They stopped by the door and glanced at Gannon, who nodded to them before standing up and walking out. He stopped by Clarice at the door.

"Don't belong; I don't want to be dragging you to the cells for disobeying the King," Gannon tells them. She nods before rushing in with Abbie close behind her. Abbie embraced me, hugging me, then checking me over while Clarice stood with a cupcake in her hand.

"I had a cake made, but I couldn't carry it down," Clarice said.

"You should have seen it, Ivy. Clarice did a good job. We spent all day making it." Abbie said before frowning.

"You enjoy it then," I tell her, knowing just how much we always wished to celebrate our birthdays but were never allowed, never allowed the cakes we made for the children in the orphanage. Abbie and I always stared longingly, wishing we could try the cakes we made. We never knew if they tasted alright, but the delight on the kids' faces told us they must have or they were just being polite.

"We can't stay long; Gannon is right; the King is on the warpath. But I couldn't let you go without wishing you a happy birthday," Clarice says, placing the blue cupcake in my hand. She lights it with it a match, and I stare at the flickering flame.

"Blow it out and make a wish," Clarice said, and to humor her, I did. Abbie smiles sadly and kisses my knee where she was crouched beside me.

"What did you wish for?" Clarice asks, a teary smile on her face.

"I wished to be free," I told her, and Abbie sobbed.

"Don't say that," Abbie cried.

"I think it's a good wish," Clarice says, looking confused at Abbie.

"Not where we come from. The only freedom rogues get is in death," Abbie chokes out, and Clarice looks at me, shocked before grabbing my face in her hands.

"You wish for anything but that. Do you hear me? I will not watch my Queen die. I have buried enough of them," she says before walking out. Abbie watches her go before looking back at me.

"I wish I could stay to see you shift," she says, and I nodded, terrified of the thought of shifting with no one here, in a stable of all places surrounded by hay and horses.

"It's not too bad. We have slept in worse places," Abbie says, glancing around, trying to uplift my mood.

"I will speak to Beta Damian. Maybe he can convince the King to let me stay here with you," Abbie says, and I shake my head. She was a good friend, I was blessed to have her.

"No, stay in the castle; you don't need to be punished too," I tell her. Abbie looks at me, confused while chewing her lip.

"Abbie, love, you need to go before someone sees you and reports back to the King," Gannon tells her, and I see her cheeks turn a little pink. I smiled at Abbie. She didn't get flustered much, but just that one endearing word sent her crimson. She nods before standing and kissing my forehead.

"I will try to come back. If I not, I will tomorrow," Abbie says, rushing back to the door. She looks up at Gannon as she passes him.

"I won't leave her alone. Once she shifts, I will sneak her back into the castle," Gannon tells her before reaching for a lock of her auburn hair. He twirls it around his finger and then clears his throat, nodding and letting her rush off. I raise an eyebrow at him.

"What, she is pretty," Gannon says, shaking his head like he just got caught doing something he shouldn't.

Kyson POV

Gannon never returned all night. I waited for the mind link to open up and tell me she started shifting, but once midnight came and went and the sun rose, I peered out toward the stables in the distance through my window. Gannon stood out front, and I saw Abbie rushing down the dirt path toward her.

It angered me that Abbie would defy orders and go to her. I told everyone to steer clear of the stables.

Opening the mind link, I felt for Gannon's tether when my door opened and Damian stepped in. "She never shifted," he stated.

"I figured that much out already," I told him, my tone clipped. Damian glanced around the room and shook his head.

"You're drunk and clearly haven't slept," he snapped disapprovingly.

"I was waiting for her to shift,"

"And the bottles?" He asks, picking up an empty one and tossing it at the fireplace.

"I don't need your scolding, Damian," I answered, walking over to my bed and lying down.

"She never shifted," Damian stated again.

"I am aware,"

"Gannon said all night she was fretting, trying to nest with the damn horses. You are delaying her," Damian yelled at me. His anger was beginning to bother me and it was getting to the point, I would have to put him in his place.

"I am doing no such thing; I had her put outside where the damn moon is, so don't blame me for her not shifting. She is probably the oddity that gets the traits and does not shift," Damian growled at my words though deep down, I knew it was because of me. I could feel her distress, just couldn't bring myself to go to her.

"At least fucking heal her hand and stop being a jerk," he snarled, storming off to my closet. He comes out with some of my clothes in his arms.

"We are moving her to the east wing, your old room. That's where she will be when you get over yourself." Damian tells me.

"I don't want her in the castle,"

"Too bad, I am not having my Queen in the fucking stables like some farm animal," Damian snapped before walking out and slamming the door. I sighed before glaring at the picture of my sister on top of the bedside table drawer.

Maybe he was right, and I was being irrational, yet I couldn't get the picture of her mother from my head, the state of my sister, and the way her stomach was torn into and my nephew mutilated in her

womb. I was stuck in that thought pattern when his voice invaded my head causing me to growl.

"They found more bodies," Trey says through the link.

"Where"

" two days from here," he answered.

"Get a car ready," I tell him.

I changed quickly, stumbling around the room. Maybe I overdid it. Walking out, Dustin stared vacantly ahead.

"Tell Gannon and Damian to meet me at the cars. You are to remain with me. Send Trey to watch over Ivy for me," I told him. He nodded, and I stumbled down the steps trying to find my feet.

Dustin gripped my arm as I lost my footing, and I nodded to him. "My King, I don't think Trey is a good choice to watch the Queen," he says, and I look at him. He dropped his head, and I noticed his swallow as I glared at him.

"He is part of my guard; he will do the job he is asked," I told him, continuing down the steps.

Losing my footing again, I stumbled on the bottom step and nearly hit the ground. Guards rushed toward me when I collided with someone. They prevented my fall, and I shook my head as I gripped their shoulder.

"You okay, my king?" Ester asked, and I waved the other men off.

"Fine, just help me to my office,"

"Of course," she said a little too willingly. I held back my swear, letting her steer me to my office. I flopped into my chair.

"I will retrieve some water," she said, and I waved her off.

"My King," Dustin started, and I growled.

"Leave me, tell Damian to get me when he is ready to leave," I snapped at him, dismissing him. I close my eyes, trying to catch a little sleep before having to leave, which no doubt would be soon when the mind-link opened up.

"Roads are closed over the bridge. We need to wait," Damian tells me.

"Wake me when it opens," I tell him.

"Yes, my King. What about Ivy?" I press my lips together before sighing and pinching the bridge of my nose.

"Put her in my old quarters, ensure she has what she needs," I tell him not happy with her being here but if it got them off my back and settled my damn instincts, I would allow it.

"She needs you, my king," Damian tells me.

"And I can't be near her right now," I replied with a growl.

"Kyson, you leave, what happens when she shifts?" he asked.

"What do you expect me to do?"

"I expect you to stay," I growl.

"We will talk about when you wake me," I tell him, cutting him off before he could say more.

Forcing myself to my feet, I stagger over to my chaise, falling heavily into it and welcoming the oblivion when sleep finally takes me. However, I tossed and turned the bond, calling me to go to her, her distress waking me constantly. Trying to get comfortable, I blocked everyone out. Damian would find me when it was time to leave. Though I didn't remain asleep for long when I felt someone touch me.

The feeling of someone tugging on my belt made me stir, and I blinked up at the ceiling, confused before feeling a hand reach into my pants. I jumped, lurching upright and looking at the intruder. Her vile scent wafting to my nose.

"I didn't mean to startle you, my King," Ester's voice came like someone was drilling into my ears.

"What do you think you're doing?" I growled at her before rubbing my eyes and peering at her. I blink again when I see she is naked.

"Where are your goddamn clothes?" I tell her, averting my gaze to anything other than her.

"You were having trouble sleeping; I have been watching you. Let me help," she says while leaning down and tugging at my pants. I gripped her hand and growled at her.

"I don't need your help, Ester; I suggest you leave," I warn her. She jerks her hand from my grip, and her eyes well with tears.

"My king?" She cries.

"I am not yours, nor will you ever be mine. Now get out before I have you whipped," I snarled at her.

"Oh, my king, you must be tired; it's me, Ester," she says, trying to climb onto my lap. I grip her throat. Disgusted, she dared to think she could touch me, touch what does not belong to her.

"I said get out, you are not Ivy. You do not touch me," I told her before realizing what I said. She stumbles backward when I let her go. I watch as she snatches up her clothes before looking at me. I growl at her, and she runs out the door, opening it just as Damian is about to walk in.

"Have you completely lost it?" Damian snarled, entering, slamming the door behind him.

"I woke up to her touching me,"

"Please tell me you didn't," he snarled.

"What, of course not. What do you take me for?" He sighed, and I re-buttoned my pants before sniffing my clothes. Her stench was all over me.

I tug my shirt off, toss it in the trash, with a growl.

"I want her away from my side of the castle. I don't want to see Ester's face here again."

"Will it have it arranged? What about what Dustin told us about her?" he asked. I had completely forgotten about that.

"Banish her,"

"My King, she is a Lycan,"

"Then banish her from the castle," I tell him and he nods.

Ivy POV

The night was long and stretched out for what felt like forever. It was grueling, and the pain was unbearable. However, I never shifted, just wallowed in despair at the rejection of my mate. My bones ached, and my chest constricted.

By morning, I had woken in the nest I had built. It became obvious I wouldn't be shifting, I should have already. Gannon tried to tell me I was fretting for my mate, but it made no sense to me. I had just seen him the day before, if only briefly. But it was enough for him to rip my heart out. I would have preferred if he had because that was one of the worst nights I had endured. More so than when he was gone because I knew he was here, just out of my reach.

Abbie sat with me on the wharf that allowed you to walk out across the lake. She had brought me over here to have breakfast, though I had no appetite and couldn't bring myself to eat. Although we enjoyed the morning sun, enjoyed the rays heating my cold skin, I felt cold all over deep into my bones. It was like I had never known warmth and wouldn't again. The ache was horrible. Abbie tried to cheer me up. She told me of everything that happened in the castle last night. Though it mainly fell on deaf ears.

Apparently, she heard the word from one of the guards that more children were found in river beds in neighboring towns. She also said all night the castle was on edge and that the King had been insufferable. He even attacked two of the night guards. I stared longingly at the castle, knowing he was there. So close yet so far. Pulling my gaze from it, Abbie moved closer to the edge of the wharf, and I gripped her arm. "Abbie!" I hissed as she tossed her legs over the side and into the water.

"Gannon is right there," she pointed him out, and I let her go with a sigh. I knew he wouldn't let her drown, yet fear still bubbled in me. Abbie dangled her feet over the edge. But I wasn't daring enough. I couldn't even see the bottom of the still lake. Watching her so close to the edge made my nauseous stomach worse. If she fell in, I would be of no use to her and would drown myself trying to save her. Abbie was right, and I knew I was being foolish. Gannon wouldn't let her drown if she fell in. He would come to her aid if needed.

"I have to head back soon. I have to go into town with Clarice to grab some supplies," Abbie told me. My eyes blurred with more tears at hearing she would have to leave me, but I nodded sadly, knowing it couldn't be helped. I was surprised he let her come to see me. I would have to go back to my prison, stuck in the stables where he placed me.

Abbie worried her lip between her teeth and clutched my fingers gently. "Maybe I could ask if you could come?" she said hopefully. But I knew it would never be allowed. I never had a chance to answer when I heard screaming from the castle's direction. My head whipped toward the direction of the feminine screams, and I saw Ester thrashing and screaming her head off while two guards dragged her across the manicured lawns. Abbie stood up, and Gannon turned to look up the hill where the castle was.

"Ha, serves her right," Abbie chuffed, and I looked at her from where I sat, wondering what happened that Ester was being escorted out.

"What did she do?" I asked curiously. Abbie turned and looked down at me and gasped before her

head turned to Ester, still thrashing as they led her toward the front of the castle, toward the enormous iron gates.

"I worry it may upset you, but nothing happened. The King woke up before she could do anything," Abbie told me as she looked down at her hands, picking at her nails.

"Before she did what?" I asked, suddenly feeling sick. Especially knowing she had been with Kyson in the past, though Clarice said he looked for a replacement. One thing I thought about last night was if she would be back to being his servant? The thought sickened me.

"The King woke early this morning in his office to Ester fondling him," Abbie told me, and I felt like I was going to be sick at her words. Bile burned my throat, and my heart sank. A whimper left my lips before I could stop it as I thought of her touching him. Panic bubbled within me, and I felt like I was choking. My ability to breathe suddenly cut off.

"Hey, hey. Nothing happened, I promise. I heard the guard talking this morning. When he woke, he was livid and tossed her out. He then banished her from the castle, so I guess they finally found her. He didn't do anything with her, Ivy. I promise you," she said, clutching my face in her hands.

"That's it. Breathe, Ivy. He didn't betray you," Abbie whispered as I tried to stop my panic attack. She wiped my tears, and I felt so stupid, so weak. How could a bond have such an effect? I hoped it would lessen.

"So he didn't sleep with her?" I asked, letting out a breath finally.

"No, apparently, she ran naked from his office crying like her bum was on fire," Abbie snickered. Yet I couldn't find the humor in her words. The thought of her being near him sent a sharp pain through my chest and also upset me. However, it was odd because I also felt bad for her. I never found pleasure in another's pain, even if it was justified. Abbie was about to say something else when a whistle caught our attention. Abbie and I looked to the hill, and we saw Clarice wave to us.

"I gotta go, but I will try to visit you later," Abbie says, briefly hugging me before rushing off back down the wharf. I followed, watching as she ran past Gannon and up the hill to Clarice. Damian, I noticed, was coming down the small path leading toward the stables. As I reached the stable doors, I waited for him.

"Morning Beta," I told him, baring my neck to him.

"You don't do that for me, Ivy. You're my superior, not the other way around," Damian told me, and I shook my head.

"A superior who is in the stables because her King can't bear the sight of her," I tell him, and Gannon wanders over. Damian looks away and clicks his tongue before he clenches his jaw.

"He will get over it, Ivy; he just needs time," Damian says with a swift nod. I doubted it.

The King didn't even come down when I should have shifted last night, not that I did. But he had promised, and for some reason, I thought he would keep his, though many he had broken already in just one night. Something else for him to hate me for. He had a dud for a mate. It's bad enough I was a traitor, but the Moon Goddess had to do one better and make me a failure.

"I have some good news, though," Damian said, holding his hand out to me. I looked at it before placing my good hand in his. He placed it on his arm and tucked his arm to the side. I raised an eyebrow at him. He started up the path he had just walked down, leading back to the castle. For a second, hope flared to life, only to die down when he spoke again.

"The King said you can stay in his old quarters; you will be more comfortable up there," he says, and I stop. Beta Damian also stopped and looked down at me.

"He said I could come back?" I asked hopefully. Beta Damian glanced at Gannon for a second before turning his gaze back to me.

"He didn't, did he?" I asked.

"I convinced him, but he is aware you will stay in his old room," Damian told me.

"His old room?" I whispered, holding back tears.

"Yes, the room he currently uses used to be his sisters," Damian explains.

"Before my mother killed her," I sighed, still unable to believe she killed someone. It all felt surreal. Nevertheless, Damian escorted me back to the castle, and as we approached the castle doors that led into the foyer, the door opened, and Kyson stepped out. He stopped in his tracks before eyeing my hand on Damian's arm. His eyes flickered, and he growled. I yanked my hand away before his eyes went to mine for a second before going to Damian.

"Find me when you're done," the King said, not bothering to acknowledge my existence before he turned and stalked off toward where the cars were waiting out front of the castle. I stared after him while pain rippled through my chest at his dismissal of me. Gannon growled before following after him, and Damian looked down at me.

"Come on, I will show you where he put you," Damian said, tugging me inside.

"You mean where you decided to put me? He doesn't look too happy I will be here," I tell him.

The room was bigger than the King's as I stepped inside, though you could tell it had remained untouched by the dust that had settled on everything. One of the servants was in here trying to clean it up. Uncovering all the furniture that was covered by sheets. It felt weird watching her try to clean the place, and I moved to help her when Damian stopped me, pointing to the bathroom.

"Bathroom is through there. I will help her. Go take a shower and get cleaned up. I placed some of Kyson's clothes in the closet for you. It might help with the discomfort. Gannon said you struggled last night, my Queen." The female servant watched me curiously at his words. I frowned that she was expected to clean this room, all because I would be staying in it. It was too big of a task for one person.

"I will help. Go get cleaned up," Damian said, nudging me toward the bathroom. With a sigh, I gave up.

I smelled terrible after spending all night in the stables. The girl had already restocked the bathroom,

everything shiny and clean. A fresh towel hung on the side of the huge spa bath that sat in the center. Across the far wall stood an open shower, no screen, just two showerheads protruding from the wall and a drain that ran along the entire back of the bathroom.

All the counter space was made of black marble and the floors slate. All the finishings were gold and had double basins. It made me wonder if Kyson stayed in the other room just to feel close to his sister because this room was much more luxurious and as big as his entire quarters. I showered quickly, washing all remnants of the stables off. Feeling clean, I stepped out in my towel, wondering where the closet was Damian spoke of.

I went to ask when I noticed the room was empty, yet all the furniture was uncovered, and the curtains were drawn. No dust insight made me realize just how much quicker Lycans were than common werewolves. Wandering through the room, I opened a door, finding an untouched office and everything covered over still. I quickly closed the door before opening another and finding a library. However, the shelves were bare, and the room was dark. Not that I could read anyway, so there is no point in a stocked library. Yet it made me think of Kyson and his love for reading.

Moving across the room, I rolled my eyes, having missed the door next to the bathroom, which would be the most obvious place for a closet. I walked over to it and gripped the handle, pulling it open.

His scent was everywhere. Few of his clothes were hung, but I recognized a few pieces I knew were from his room. Stepping in, his scent overwhelmed me, and my heart ached as I clutched it. It brought me to my knees. Not caring for my injured hand, I started ripping the clothes off the hangers. Needing his scent, needing him as I curled up in a ball among his clothes. Some primal, instinctual part taking over all rational thought and sending me wild with uncontrollable grief.

My entire being was anxious as I clawed at the ground. I felt unhinged, uncontrollable, and I cursed him as much as I longed for him. Surely no one could survive this sort of heartache.

My instincts were all over the place. Time stood still, and I had no idea how long I had remained in here for when the door opened.

My growl was violent, and my claws sank into the soft gray, plush carpet, slicing through it like a hot knife through butter. The woman jumped back, startled, pulling away from me just in time to see her face. Recognition returned to me, and I scrambled after her to apologize, but she was already gone.

The door shut behind her with a soft click. My skin felt like it was crawling as I clawed at it, suddenly feeling cold, and I wanted to go back to my den. The smell of food hit my nostrils, and I peered over at the table between the armchairs and fireplace to notice the bowl of hot soup. I wrinkled my nose because it was tainting the scent of my mate. Turning, I walked back to the closet and shut the door before burrowing back inside my nest.

Kyson POV

The carpet had been paced so many times by my feet I was wearing it down. My fingers throbbed and ached, and I growled. My entire being vibrated with the urge to track her down, knowing she was just on the other side of the castle and the cause of my pain. It had been two days since I last laid eyes on her, and the bond was dulling.

I wanted it gone, busying myself with work, but it was near impossible when my fucking hand wouldn't stop throbbing. Annoyed, I growled, reaching for the bottle, my vice, when I felt like I was losing what control I had. We should be investigating the recent deaths, but the bridge remained closed. So relief flooded me when Gannon stepped into the room to report it was now open. I needed to get out of this place and away from Damian. He had been incessantly annoying me to go see her.

"Bridge has reopened, my King," I nod, pouring some whiskey into my glass before downing it. "Get the cars ready; we are leaving," I told him without looking over at him as I poured another drink.

"Yes, my King, but Ivy," he started to say.

"Do not speak her name," I bellowed, tossing my glass across the room. It exploded, smashing against the brickwork around the fireplace, the glass shattering everywhere. Gannon was unflinching in my anger used to it. However, I was on the verge of exploding. He would run then; they all did.

"As I was saying, she has not left the closet in two days. No one can get into her room or near her, not even Abbie. She hasn't eaten, and her fretting is getting worse." Gannon said, ignoring me.

"Not my problem. I let her back into the castle. Tell Damian to deal with her." I snapped, annoyed at their worry for her. She was a traitor's daughter.

"My King, your Queen,"

"She is not your Queen; she never will be," I snarled. Gannon growled before turning and walking out. My shoulders sagged as he left, and I clenched my hand, my fingers aching before opening the mind-link.

"Dustin, have the car ready. You drive with me today," I tell him.

"My King, Beta Damian usually."

"I said you drive with me, send a maid in to clean up the glass in my room," I tell him, cutting his words off.

"Yes, my King," he says, and I cut off the link. After retrieving my wallet and phone, I grabbed my jacket before leaving the room and heading downstairs. I chuck my jacket to Dustin, who catches it by placing it over his arm. Clarice and Abbie were excitedly talking about something, and Abbie was glowing vibrantly and nearly bouncing on the spot. The groceries in her arms nearly toppled out of the basket she carried. Clarice tried to get her to contain her excitement over whatever it was that had her bouncing with joy.

They cut off abruptly, noticing me, and Abbie bowed respectfully, bearing her neck to me. Gannon

stood off near the doors glaring angrily at the wall, and I would have to ask him later what he was so angry about in such a brief span of time. Surely, his anger wasn't because of our tiff earlier.

Stepping past them, I went to leave. The sun was setting, and I wanted to get to the town before nightfall. Eager to put a stop to those killing all these rogue children and their families. Gannon followed me silently; his anger I could feel brewing behind me only made the throbbing in my hand worse. Bringing the pulse in my hand back to the forefront of my mind and emblazoning my anger more.

Clarice caught up to me with a duffle bag, obviously having escaped the gushing Abbie. "For fuck's sake, can someone send a doctor to look at her fucking hand?" I roared before twisting and punching the stone wall.

Pain flared up my arm, and Clarice dropped the bag in her hands. My anger diffused, and my burning hatred dissolved as my Lycan side settled. It was becoming too much. Gannon's mood also changed, and Clarice stood quivering beside me, and I sighed, dropping my aura. Unsure of what came over me.

"No one can get close to her. We have tried, my King," Clarice murmured. Her voice trembled, and I glanced at the woman. Her face was pale from the fright I had just given her.

My knuckles bled, and I balled my hand into a fist. The dull throbbing was sending me insane. The fact she wasn't allowing anyone in was pissing me off. Does she not know I can fucking feel it? Days I had been complaining and asking them to tend to her. With a snarl, I turned and stalked off toward my old chambers when Gannon's hand fell on my shoulder, and I stopped, turned my head, and glared at him.

"Mind your place, Gannon," I warned him.

"Your intentions first, my King," he said, clenching his jaw. The man was tempting my rage to come forth again. They all were pushing me to my limits.

"They knew they were no match but would die trying, and for her, their rogue fucking Queen I haven't even marked. Complete idiocy on my part, making them swear to that pact it would override me every damn time, but they would never be a match for the beast that lived in me. No one was a match for the Lycan King. They knew it too, but I knew they would die for her, no matter who brought them their demise.

I kept walking, his hand falling from my shoulder as I stalked toward the castle entrance.

"My King," Gannon called.

"Kyson," He bellowed, but I ignored him, stalking up the steps before turning in the opposite direction of my quarters to go to my old room.

Gannon jogged to keep up with my long strides as I hunted her down before approaching the double doors leading into the room. I shoved them open, and Gannon tried to grab me. I turned and growled, my aura slamming into him and stunning him.

"Out!" I ordered. The command gripped him instantly. They may have the pact to uphold, but they couldn't fight a direct command. I slammed the doors as he stood stunned, unable to cross the threshold.

Turning around to face the room, it was dark. The curtains closed, and I reached over and flicked on

the light. Shocked at the state of the room. The mattress was torn to shreds; the linens shredded. Plates sat by the door, still full like they merely slid the trays through the gap. The stench was horrendous from the rotting food, and I gagged before picking up the trays and opening the door. I thrust them toward Gannon, who gripped them.

"Get rid of it," I snapped, shutting the door.

Wandering through the room, I checked the bathroom, but there was no sign of her. Her scent was everywhere, stuffing from the mattress scattered all over the floor when I heard the remnants of low muffled growl. Turning, I faced the closet. The door was closed, yet her scent was most potent in this corner. Crouching down, I gripped the door handle, opening the door to find two blue sapphire eyes illuminated in the darkness. Her canines protruded as she lifted her head from amongst the stuffing and shredded clothes. My clothes and the linens from the room covered the floor where she built her little nest.

I was a trespasser in her den, a threat to her area. She still hadn't recognized me. Her instincts feral and guilt tried to strangle me for what I let become of her. She moved from beneath the linens, her hand falling on the carpet in front of me. Clawed nails sliced through it as she calculated her attack. Ivy may not have shifted or been able to, but She-wolves were just as dangerous when they felt threatened.

Wild gleaming eyes peered back at me before a feral snarl was cut off as she sniffed the air. She honestly looked more animal than the Ivy I was used to. I did this to her, made her this way. The guilt flooding through me ate me.

I had destroyed her. Yet I pushed it aside, remembering why I came up here. I crawled a little into her space, and she growled my body's own reaction to settle her reacting without my say as I purred, calling her out of her den.

Briefly, I wondered if it would work because it was clear to me she had been left to fret about the bond I had denied her. Her whimper told me the bond wasn't completely lost as she launched forward before halting at my command before she could touch me. She fell forward onto the carpet, belly down, submissive. I looked away; it was essentially what the calling was for making them submissive, yet it pained me seeing her this way, using it against her this way.

My heart jolted seeing her completely submissive by the bond, a slave to it any way she could have it. Moving closer, I reached for her hand. The sparks were weak but still there as I lifted her hand to my mouth. A few days and I had managed to wipe out everything that I loved about her just by denying her the bond.

Her breath hitched, and her other hand reached for me gripped my knee as I sucked on her fingers, healing each one before setting it down while trying to ignore her hand on my leg, her nails slicing my pants and skin. I pried her claws from my leg and dropped the calling, allowing her up. I looked away from her. She was completely naked. Claw marks raked down her soft flesh, marring her skin.

"I need to leave," I told her. My voice held no emotion though my urge to bundle her in my arms and soothe was near impossible to hold back. Reaching my hand over my head, I gripped my shirt, tugging it off before pulling it over her head.

"You eat; you don't stay in here. You need time outside. I will be back in two days," I told her before walking out.

Ivy POV

As the days slipped by, his scent lingered a little less. Each day passed, my senses sharpened, my mind became clearer, and slowly I found the remnants of what was left of me. After so much solitude, I had slowly returned and found who I was, no longer ruled by instincts I was unfamiliar with. Agony was the only word I could use to describe it. One thing became obvious: I could not shift. It saddened me, and I wondered whether it was because of the bond like Gannon had said all those days ago or if I was a failure in that regard too.

I had vague memories of the King coming into the room. I remembered him healing my hand, but that was the last time I saw him. The King said he would be gone for two days; however, he was gone so much longer than that; I did not know how long it had been since I left this room, left my nest, but I had a feeling a considerable amount of time had passed.

As the days dragged on, they became more manageable, a little less painful. Once Kyson's scent was gone, and only my scent remained in the room, I realized that my den no longer fulfilled its original purpose, and the bond was now only a distant memory, or so I hoped. Eventually, I was able to see my surroundings again. Clarity returned, and the fog lifted. It was like someone flipped a switch, and everything either went numb or died off. I wasn't sure which one, but I didn't care. I could finally breathe, finally felt more like myself in days.

As one of the servants slid a tray across the floor just inside the door, I was drawn to the sound of the door creaking open. Getting up, I moved toward her, and she shrieked, the noise startling me and making me jump back and away from her, and she quickly slammed the door shut behind her. The smell of eggs wafted to my nose, and my stomach rumbled hungrily.

Upon looking down, I realized I had no clothes on, making my eyes widen in shock. How long had I been naked for? Shaking my head, I rushed to the cupboard to find some clothes, only everything was shredded. I looked at the torn sheets and my lip curled in disgust as I scooped them up and sniffed them. My scent was potent on them and I definitely needed to find something clean to wear.

Claw marks shredded through every scrap of cloth in this room made me look at my fingertips. How, when I can't shift? It puzzled me. Shaking my head, I grabbed some of the longer pieces and made a sarong out of them. I looked like a peasant. I chuckled at the thought as I stood in front of the mirror in the bathroom.

Mrs. Daley would have whipped me good for seamstress skills or lack thereof. Wandering out of the bathroom, I retrieved the tray from the floor by the door. Moving toward the fireplace, I sat on the floor by the coffee table. My hands trembled as I picked up the fork, making me wonder when the last time I ate was. I practically inhaled my food, barely tasting any of it. I was ravenous, and it barely touched the sides. When I was done, I wandered around the room, wondering if I was allowed to leave the room. When an hour passed and I saw no one enter, I walked to the bedroom doors leading in with my empty tray in my hand.

No one stood outside my door, no guards or anything, so I figured I must be allowed to leave the room; I looked down at my lovely bedsheet attire and shook my head. Yep, I was doing this; I was going to walk down to the kitchen and pray no one saw me in my sheet sarong or noticed the fact I

had no clothes on underneath it or peeked my ass, which I knew wasn't fully covered; I could feel the draft from the open bedroom window caress against me. This was mortifying, but seriously it can't be any worse than the King rejecting our bond, so I shrugged and stepped out. If I could survive that agony, then I could survive a little embarrassment.

As I moved through the corridors trying to remember the way, one thing became clear. No one was on this side of the castle. The place was ghostly and quiet until I came to the stairs.

Straight across was the King's quarters, yet it was also silent, and no guards stood or lined the corridors. It was eerily quiet, maybe because it was so early in the morning. The sun was only just rising. However, I thought, a little strange. Descending down the stairs, it was the same.

Where was everybody? I couldn't figure it out. The kitchen was also empty, as I made my way to the laundry room and retrieved a servant's uniform. I wasn't daring enough to enter the King's quarters in search of clothes. I was afraid of my nose picking up his mouth-watering scent and I would be plunged back into the darkness the bond held me in for days..

The sound of a horn in the distance made me move to the laundry window as I buttoned up my uniform to see everyone down by the river that ran at the back of the castle. It appeared the entire palace was down there because no one was present or near, and the place was silent as the night. Grabbing some flats from the shelf, I slipped them on my feet and stepped out the back door to where the long clotheslines were. This side of the castle was surrounded by fruit trees and gardens. Sheets flapped along with the breeze as I made my way down the back to the hill, where I could see everyone standing still as statues staring out at the horizon. I kept close to the trees, wanting to know what was going on but also to go unseen.

All uniformed guards stood in rows, and people from the town outside the castle gates took up most of the hill. Unable to see, I walked out of my hiding place and stopped beside one of the guards. I tried to see what was going on and why everyone had gathered around. The guard looked down at me, and I peered back at him in confusion when I saw his eyes glaze over. It was only moments later that Gannon was beside me. He led me down the hill bringing me to where Abbie stood at the front with Clarice and the castle servants. Only then did I realize why everyone was gathered here. It was a cemetery. Hundreds and hundreds of black marble headstones lined the flat before the river.

My stomach dropped, and I looked at Abbie, who seemed shocked to see me, but remained quiet. She reached over and gripped my fingers with hers. The King stood at the front where I saw 13 fresh graves dug; he stared off vacantly toward the path leading to the surrounding forest. I could only see the side of him, but he must have sensed my stare because he turned his head and looked at me. His eyes met mine, and my heart sputtered in my chest; he then turned his gaze away like I was merely another servant or member of the public.

Time seemed to stop, and I sucked in a breath when I saw the open graves that had been freshly dug. I peered around before seeing a succession of coffins being carried to the gravesites where the King stood. I had no idea what had happened, but one thing was clear to me. Most of the coffins belonged to children. They weren't large enough to be adults. Four of them, I could tell, were adult sized coffins, but the other nine were children's coffins.

The guards carrying them stopped by a grave and set them down before music started playing from the violinist I hadn't noticed was at the side by the water. It was complete silence while I waited for the coffins to be lowered into each grave. Nobody spoke. We merely watched. Something had happened; that much was apparent. I wondered briefly if this was where the King had gone. If so, when did he return to organize all this?

When it finished and the coffin were laid to rest. A horn blared again, and after a few minutes, everyone started climbing the hill and leaving. The place was packed. However, I noticed the King remained. Abbie grabbed my arm and tugged me up the hill, back toward the castle. I could feel she was almost vibrating beside me, squeezing my hand like she couldn't believe I was holding it. We went back in through the laundry, following Clarice. The moment I stepped inside, I was crushed between the two of them as they smothered me in their warmth.

"You're back?" Abbie gushed while squeezing me tight. Clarice cupped my face in her hands, her eyes teary, and she let out a breath. I went to ask what happened when the King suddenly stepped into the laundry. His scent hit me like a brick to the face and stunned me.

"Get back to work," the King snapped at us before stalking past us without so much as a backward glance. I swallowed and stared after him as he went through the kitchens. Gannon and Damian followed after him as he left without acknowledging my existence. I bit the inside of my lip. The pain helped the pang of hurt that coursed through my chest as the metallic taste of my blood washed over my tongue.

"He will come around," Clarice tells me, gripping my shoulder, but I was sick of hearing it. Sick of losing days to a bond he broke. I wasn't going to wait around and hide in my room for him. Nope, I would keep busy, and everything can go back to how it was. Just me and Abbie against the world, the way it used to be. So with that, I grabbed some cleaning supplies, ignoring Clarice's protests that I wasn't a servant, and followed Abbie to help her do her chores which she was excited about. Finally, I was doing something other than wallowing and hiding away from everyone. Abbie told me the King returned yesterday morning and spent the day hand digging the graves himself, refusing help when the guards tried to step in and take over. He apparently spent the night destroying his room before Damian had dragged him off to train with the guards.

The day passed by quickly as we busied ourselves, and it felt good to move around, using muscles I barely used in days. However, Abbie became antsy and jittery towards the end of the day.

"Are you okay?" I asked her as she practically bounced on her feet. Gannon growled behind us. He had

been following us around for most of the day; I didn't know if he chose to or if Gannon was ordered to follow us by the King. I wasn't sure, and I never asked. If the King was going to pretend I didn't exist, that was fine, but I wasn't waiting around for him to change his mind any longer.

Clarice sighed and looked over at her, where we stood on the other side of the kitchen counter. Clarice rolled her eyes before speaking. "Go on then," she said with a dismissive wave. Abbie squealed before grabbing me, pecking my cheek, and rushing off out of the kitchen.

"Wait, where are you going?" I called after her, but she was already gone and out of earshot. I turned to Clarice, and she clucked her tongue and shook her head.

"You should head up to your room, Ivy. I will send someone up with your dinner," Clarice told me and my brows furrowed, and I turned to look at Gannon. He was glaring at the wall above our heads. Clarice cleared her throat, which appeared to snap him out of the homicidal stare off he was having.

"Right, I will escort her up," Gannon says, but I wave him off. Only he insisted on following. When I reached the top of the staircase, I noticed Damian coming out of the King's room with a tray. He started walking toward us, but I quickly rushed off to find my room before locking myself in with a sigh. Abbie and I had fixed the room up and cleaned it earlier today, but I was met with silence as I sat on the sofa in front of the fireplace. This room was too big to just sit in by yourself.

The silence surrounding me was deafening and after a few hours of absolute silence. I went in search of Abbie's small room, which I knew was in Beta Damian's quarters. However, when I reached the lower level and found her room, her bed was empty. Abbie's small room was much like the one I was originally in when I was still the King's servant. Her scent perfumed the room and brought me comfort, so curling up on her bed, I waited for her to return.

Kyson POV

The door opening had me looking over my shoulder from where I sat in my seat by the fire. Damian walked on in and glared at the glass in my hand. He knew better than to say anything. "Ivy finally came out of the room," he told me as if I didn't already know. He sat across from me.

"I noticed," I said simply before bringing my glass to my lips and draining the last remnants. Damian sighed and stood back up when I held the glass out to him. He moved toward the bar area and poured another glass before handing it back to me.

"Do you plan on just drowning out the bond?" he asked. I hummed, and he snarled at me. His aura slipped out in his anger, although it had no effect on me.

"You have already destroyed her bond toward you. She had little to no reaction when she saw you," Damian spat as if I wasn't aware of that.

"If only I was so lucky to have it break," I told him, earning another growl.

"You're a fucking idiot. There are no second chance mates like the werewolves; Lycans don't get those, nor can you reject her, either. The bond won't sever for you, Kyson; it will always be there, so why do you choose to ignore it?"

"Because I can," I tell him, sipping my drink and enjoying the taste as it coated my tongue.

"If that was true, why is it that every time I see you, you have a drink in your hand?" he asked, glaring at my glass of whiskey. He shook his head and clutched his hair in frustration while pacing in front of the fireplace.

"My relationship with Ivy is none of your business, so leave it," I tell him, not caring for his input.

"She is my Queen," he bellowed, his face turning red in anger, and his claws slipped out. He fisted his hands and took a deep breath, closing his eyes before dropping back into the seat across from me.

"She is your mate or Queen. She should be ruling alongside you, not rotting away in a room by herself."

"And what good is her being Queen when she can't even shift? I can't even change her now, so there is no point getting attached to her when she will be dead in fifty years, anyway. Then what, Damian, you seem to think you know everything?" I asked him.

"She can fucking shift; you just severed the bond, forcing her wolf-side dormant. You know as well as I do, if you spent time with her, you could lure it back out," he fumed while I scoffed.

"We don't know that. Ivy was a rogue for so long; that is probably why she can't shift,"

"Then mark her!" he bellowed at me. I shook my head at his words.

"You are making a mistake, Kyson. She may not accept you back if you leave this too long. You could ruin any future you thought you would have with her." Damian said.

"She isn't going anywhere; I am not stupid. Do you think I would let her leave the castle or me and have her weaken me?"

"You're selfish. You can't expect Ivy to just wait around for the day you will change your mind, Kyson. Don't be fucking cruel; you can't live without her, you will grow weak, and her not being able to shift puts her at risk of not only her werewolf-side remaining dormant but the bond completely severing for her; she will feel nothing toward you, then what? A few years down the track, and you pull your head out of your ass, you think she will just take you back?" he asked.

"If that happened, which it won't, she wouldn't have a choice. I will force her or use the damn calling on her."

"You disgust me," he spat at me, and I shrugged. "I am King, I can do as I please with my mate,"

"Then do the right thing. You're better than this," Damian snarled.

"And if I'm not?" I asked him as he went to walk out. I looked over the back of the lounge to see him stop by the door.

"Then you're not my King," he said before yanking the door open and walking out of my room. I glared at the burning fire, angered that it had to be this way. She didn't even react when I saw her; I expected some emotion, anything from her, but all I got was a blank stare from her. I could hardly feel her anymore, although the bond and pull to her had only grown stronger. Crushing my chest and heart more with each passing day. With that, I got up and poured another drink, trying to drown the ache the bond caused.

When the alcohol could not satiate the urge any longer, I did what I did every night when here and went to sit by her door. It was the only thing that drove the pain away. I walked toward her room before peering inside. Only when I did, the lights were all still on. I checked the closet, but she wasn't in there or any of the rooms next to the main one. My brows furrowed when I noticed her guard was also not around. I told him to remain unnoticed while up here, but that didn't mean hiding from me.

"Dustin, where are you?" I asked through the mind-link.

"In Beta Damian's quarters, my King. Ivy has gone into Abbie's room. She hadn't come out for a while," he answered, and I sighed. At least she was with Abbie.

"I take it Abbie has returned from visiting her mate in town?" I ask him.

"No, my King. I peered into the room before she has fallen asleep in Abbie's bed; Gannon also left to go find Abbie." I chewed my lip. Gannon had taken the news pretty badly. He really had fallen hard for the girl, which was surprising. Gannon wasn't one for feelings and hardly left his station, but I had noticed he followed Abbie everywhere when not busy. I always caught him wherever she was, though she was oblivious to him shadowing her.

Abbie seemed stoked to have found her mate, though I worried what would happen when the Alpha left to go back to his pack. We didn't really associate with Packs, but he always offered a lending hand and had been the biggest help when coming to the hunters and rogue issues. No doubt he wanted to remain in my good graces, but an ally was an ally, and we didn't have many amongst the werewolf packs. Sure, they obeyed orders, but only a couple would go out of their way and seek me out, offering to help in any way they could.

Gannon had expressed concern for her already. He, too, was worried about her leaving with him. But if she asked, I couldn't deny her. Mate bonds aren't to be denied if they both want the same thing, so I would tell her yes if she asked.

Although Alpha Kade was a man whore, and I know he is already married, though he never marked the woman, they have three kids together, and he had countless women on the side. I know Gannon tried to tell her that, but she refused to believe him.

The mate bond had a good grip on her, and Abbie refused to see him any other way than the bond would allow. God knows what he has told her. She would see for herself if she decided to leave with him. Yet I also wondered how Ivy would take that news. He was scheduled to go in a couple of days, if not sooner.

Not realizing I left the mind-link open, I jumped when I heard Dustin's voice flit through my head. "Is that all my King?" he asked.

"Yes, and you can leave your station. Damian will probably be down there soon, and I am on my way anyway," I tell him.

"I don't mind staying," he said. Of course, he didn't. He would lay his life down for her over the pact my main five guards made.

"You can go; I am only a few minutes away," I told him, cutting the link.

Ivy POV

Abbie never returned, and I woke up cold and shivering. Yet I knew the room wasn't cold, and I was bundled beneath the blankets. So I wondered why I was awake at such a ghastly hour and freezing. Tossing the blankets back, I got up.

It was still dark outside, and I wondered why Abbie wasn't back. Deciding to see if she fell asleep in the servant's rooms downstairs, I stretched and yawned; I rubbed my arms, trying to warm them, and gripped the door handle only when I twisted it, weight was against it, and it flew toward me. I jumped back to see the King suddenly sprawled on the floor. His eyes flew open, and he growled, lurching forward before freezing as he turned and spotted me.

I took a step back, wondering why he was leaning against the door or why he was down here in the first place. Was he here looking for Abbie? And if he was, what for? My stomach sank with the possibilities, and before I could stop it, a whimper slipped past my lips. The King stood abruptly and scrubbed his hand down his face before looking out into the hall and back at me.

"Have you seen Damian?" he growled, looking away from me again. My brows furrowed, and I pointed to the door across from Abbie's. He looked at it and nodded, walking over to it.

"Were you asleep?" I blurted, and he stopped as he went to grip Damian's door handle. He didn't answer for a second, and I stepped out Abbie's door into the hall to find it empty.

"You aren't supposed to be at this end of the castle. Stay on your side," the King said before twisting the handle to Damian's room.

"I was only looking for Abbie," I told him, turning to head back to my room. Partway down the corridor, he called out.

"Ivy." I stopped looking back at him, and he shrugged off his jacket before walking over to me. He draped it over my shoulders and tugged it closed. I just stared at him, and he nodded before taking a step back from me. He shook his head before clearing his throat awkwardly.

"Go back to your room," he said, dismissing me. Not knowing what to say about his weird behavior, I turned on my heel and left. I checked the servants' room but couldn't find Abbie. There was no sign of her in the bathrooms either. I even asked some guards, but they shook their heads, so I went back to my enormous room. Pushing the door open, I shivered at how cold it was. The fire had gone out; I flicked a light on before wandering around and looking for matches and some kindling.

My hands shook as I tried to lit the match before using it to light the scrunched-up pieces of paper, which burned out before the wood would catch. With a sigh, I went to see if I could find a guard and ask them to light it for me because I was having no luck actually getting it to catch onto the wood. Stepping out of the room, I navigated my way back through the halls and walked toward the stairs. Only when I turned onto them, the King was walking up toward me.

"Why aren't you in your room? Were you trying to leave?" he snarled, and his eyes flickered black. I gasped and took a step back from him while shaking my head, wondering why he was mad all of a sudden.

"He's great, but he asked me to leave with him. I just need to get permission from the King,"

"You're leaving?" she nodded sadly. "Yes, in a few days, but I had a plan. Come with me?" she asked, clutching my hands.

"I will convince him. I will convince him to help get you out. We can come up with a meeting spot." Abbie said.

"Abbie, he won't go against the king," I told her. She shook her head. "I will convince him. You'll see. He will let me bring you." I chewed my lip nervously, hoping she was right. I didn't want to be here without Abbie.

For the next two days, I hardly saw Abbie. She spent all her time with her mate, which didn't bother me. I know she was anxious about the King not letting her leave. However, the King also acted strangely. Every night I would wake to find the King in my room asleep, only for him to be gone when I woke back up in the morning.

At first, I thought I was going crazy. The King would be here at random hours during the night; I would always wake to his scent. Then, by morning, it was like he was never here at all. His coming and going was making it harder. If he didn't want me, he needed to just leave me be; his coming and going was driving me insane.

He never said anything and would only stare if I caught him and accidentally woke him. Or he would ignore me completely. My heart tugged painfully for those two nights. I didn't know what he wanted, but it was clear he didn't want me. But as his scent began to settle in the room each night, it was like being rejected all over again. I started praying Abbie could convince her mate because I couldn't live like this.

The breeze was cool as the day slowed down, and all the servants prepared for dinner and end-of-day tasks. Tugging the white sheets from the clothesline with Abbie, we folded them, bringing the corners together and placing them in the basket. We had been flat out most of the day, and she had been quiet for most of it. I know she was itching to tell me something because she tried a few times, but then she would fall quiet because someone was always around.

A guard, another servant, so amongst the blowing winds and the flapping sheets, she moved closer to me before reaching over and dropping something into the front pocket of my apron. I glanced down before putting my hand in the pocket and feeling around for what it was. My fingertips brushed something cool and metal, and I twisted my wrist in the oversized pocket and looked at what it was. It was a watch.

"When the big hand is on the twelve and the little seven, I am leaving," she whispered, and I looked at her. She chewed her lip before glancing around nervously before reaching into her shirt and producing a small key from her bra. She dropped it in my pocket.

"I stole the key from Gannon; it's for the laundry door," she whispered, nodding to the one we just came out of. Behind the kitchens, it ran alongside the far gardens where the fruit trees met the forest.

"Run along the river and head west. Keep going, and you will find a bridge. Meet us at the bridge. He said he would help me get you out. You have to be there at 7 PM sharp." she whispered, and I nodded, pulling another sheet down from the clothesline. My lips quirked in the corners.

"You convinced him," I smiled.

"Yes, but he said if you're late, we can't wait. He said he doesn't want to be caught waiting outside the town limits," she told me, and I nodded. Looking at the sky, the clouds were moving in dark and heavy and it was going to be one hell of a storm when it hit. I just hoped I wasn't going to get caught in it.

"And you're sure he won't tell on me?"

"He promised me," she whispered before reaching over and gripping my arm. "We will be free, just not the freedom we used to long for, but actual freedom, freedom to live," she whispered with tears in her eyes.

"Always and forever," Abbie whispered.

"More than my life," I said in return.

"More than my life, always more," she repeated. We finished dragging the clothes in off the line and walked back through the laundry doors when Abbie shrieked. I turned to look back at her as she rubbed the spot on her back and growled. Laughter reached my ears, Abbie turned, and I noticed the rotten apple splattered against her back.

"Peter, you little shit," Abbie hissed, dropping her basket and chasing after him, picking up rotten apples that had fallen beneath the trees. Peter was one of the stable boys. He was 15 and had a mop of blonde curly hair and was always up to mischief or making a mess any way he could. Abbie shrieked when he pelted another her way. She lobbed one back, and I laughed, watching her try to hit with the apples while her shrill cries and his laughter filled the silence.

Abbie picked up another and tossed it where he went to dart behind the castle wall just as Dustin walked around. The mushy apple smacked him in the face, and he froze, stunned for a second before

wiping the mush off. Abbie snickered, trying to muffle her laughter at hitting the guard. Peter hid behind him before popping his out and sticking his tongue out at Abbie. Dustin wiping the mushy apple off his clothes growled, and I laughed, bits of apples sticking to his crisp, clean uniform and a chunk was stuck in his stubble.

Dustin's eyes go to Abbie, and she points at me; my eyes widen, and I shake my head, but he looks ridiculous with apple stuck to his face, and I chuckle. He raised an eyebrow at me.

"You think this is funny, my Queen?" he asked, a hint of a smile on his lips. I snickered before stopping when he walked over to the apple tree, making Abbie squeal and rush toward me before using me as a shield. Dustin picked up a gross-looking apple that was nearly crumbling in his hand.

Dustin tossed the apple in the air a couple of times, letting it mush up more before he laughed and threw it. I shrieked and ducked, falling on top of Abbie only to hear him gasp, and Peter burst out laughing, holding his tummy and pointing behind us. Abbie and I looked behind us to see Clarice covered in the rotted mush. We both tensed, waiting for the scolding as she stepped closer, examining her soiled apron.

She looks back up, and her eyes go to us on the ground, and Abbie and I both pointed to Dustin standing by the apple tree with Peter. We looked in their direction to find Dustin pointing the blame at Peter.

Clarice glared, and we all froze in place as the old woman stalked toward us before she ripped her apron off. "Apple war it is then," she huffed before running over and scooping up some apples. Abbie and I giggled before jumping up and joining the fray while grabbing some apples.

Kyson POV

Damian stood by my office window, entirely consumed with whatever he was staring at. He chuckled, and Gannon looked over at him. I tried to ignore them while I put my head back down to go over the maps of where the last children were found, always along the river, yet it wasn't deep enough for boats to get through, canoes maybe could, yet they were always laid out and on display like they wanted them found and were merely taunting us. However, there was always a hunter's patch, or a rebel one stuck to each body; it was the indication they were all linked. The location they were always found was never near enough to any packs to pinpoint one, and they were nowhere near any human settlements, so it was a mystery, as always. One that had been doing my head in for years, no scents, no fingerprints, nothing that indicated a location to the hunters or rebel wolves helping them.

Yet the main perpetrator of the werewolf rebellion that was helping the hunters was proven dead. Marissa, Ivy's mother, was dead that much we knew for certain, so who was leading them now? It made no sense to me. It was also the reason after my sister's death, no werewolves could set foot in my castle grounds except Alpha Kade, and of course, Abbie and Ivy who were the first werewolf servants we had in over a decade. Werewolves couldn't be trusted and everyone was scrutinised before ever entering through my castle gates.

Laughter reaching my ears made me tilt my head, I looked up from examining the dots on the map. I was looking for some sort of pattern to see Gannon and Damian watching out the window. Both of them held silly grins of amusement on their faces.

"They wanna run now. That old woman has a good arm on her," Gannon chuckled before she cringed.

"Oh, that had to have hurt," Damian snickered.

"What are you both looking at," I asked, and Gannon turned slightly to look over his shoulder at me. "Apple war," he laughed. My eyebrows raised, and he turned back to the window before snorting at whatever he was watching. Intrigued, I got up, walked over to the window, stood beside Damian, and looked down toward the gardens to see Clarice, Abbie, and Ivy were firing apples at Dustin and Peter, our stable hand boy. Cheeky little shit threw horseshit at Damian once, and man, did he go off. Damian chucked him in the small lake by the stables that day. The kid was always up to no good, but he was a breath of fresh air.

I watched with amusement as Ivy picked up an apple and lobbed it, completely missing her target, only for Dustin to hit her in the head with one. I saw the look of panic on his face when she rubbed the spot. He rushed over to her, only for her to move and facepalm with the mush in her hand.

She landed on top of him after Dustin slipped on an apple in his haste to escape her. The nervous glances I received from Gannon and Damian as they continued to wrestle each other were not missed like they expected me to blow up over them mucking around. Peter rushed to help Dustin as Ivy managed to get him to the ground, only for Peter to be smashed with an apple by Clarice. The woman fist-pumped the air.

Ivy laughed, climbing off Dustin before leaning down and smearing her hand over his face making him cringe before she ducked off. Thunder cracked across the sky. They all froze, looking up at the sky,

and Abbie's shoulders slumped, and so did Peter's. Ivy wipes her clothes off as she makes her way back to the laundry door, stopping beside Dustin and offering him a hand up.

He takes it, and she pulls him to his feet before he bows to her. Ivy shakes her head before waving goodbye to Peter, and Abbie skips over to her, wrapping an arm around her waist and pressing her head against Ivy's shoulder as they walk inside.

"They seem to be having a good time," I murmured with a nod before walking back to my bar and grabbing a glass. I poured some whiskey in it and sculled it before pouring another. Yet after the third glass, I realized no matter how much I drank, it wouldn't subdue the jealousy coursing through me at seeing her muck around with the guard.

"I wonder if Abbie has told Ivy she is leaving this afternoon," Gannon said, and I looked over at him from where he sat on the armchair at my desk.

"Well, she will know tomorrow when she wakes up, and Abbie isn't here anymore," I tell him with a shrug.

"You should have said no," Gannon growled.

"He is her mate, and she asked to go with him. I won't deny her wishes if that is what she wants," I tell him. We warned Abbie she wouldn't listen, believing whatever lies he fed her. Sometimes you just have to let people make mistakes.

"He doesn't deserve her," Gannon growled, glaring at my desk, and I sighed.

"She will see reason," Damian tells him, gripping his shoulder.

"By then, it will probably be too late," Gannon snarled.

"If not, and she wants to come back, you gave her your number. She also has the King's and mine so she can get a hold of Ivy if she wants to come back,"

"We will go get her," I finish for him, and Gannon sighs but nods his head.

"What if he hurts her?" Gannon asked. The man looked tortured at the thought.

"She's his mate; he can't hurt her without hurting himself," Damian assures him, but that wasn't true; she-wolves were always at a disadvantage when it came to men, especially Alpha men, though we didn't admit that in front of Gannon though he would be fully aware.

"There are other ways to destroy someone; you haven't got to hurt them to break them," Gannon said, and my brows furrowed at his words.

His words made me think of Ivy when I found her in the closet in her nest. I swallowed, suddenly feeling guilty, before shaking the feeling off.

Around 6.30, after everyone had dinner, I made my way downstairs. Alpha Kade was coming to retrieve Abbie, and I needed to thank him for his recent help. I was waiting out the front of the stone driveway when his BMW pulled in.

Abbie waited, sitting on the step, she had a small bag with her that Clarice had made up for her so she had a few things to take with her until the Alpha organized clothes for her. Gannon stalked off without a second glance at her excitement, as she jumped to her feet and rushed over to him.

She smacked into his chest the moment he got out of the car, and he wrapped his arms around her, burying his face in her hair before pecking her lips softly. I turned my gaze away, giving them some privacy. Also unable to see how doting he was with her, especially with knowing his home situation. It was the only thing I didn't like about the man. He was alright other than that, or as far as I knew he was okay. Though nobody truly knows what goes on behind closed doors.

"Get in the car, my love; we need to head home," He whispered, cupping her face in his hands. Abbie came over and bowed to me, and Damian gave her a brief hug before she looked around. "Where did Gannon go?" she asked, looking a little disappointed. Alpha Kade gripped her shoulder.

"You said goodbye to your friend?" he asked her and she looked up at him. She nodded. and he nodded toward the car, and she slowly walked back to it before climbing in the passenger seat and clipping her belt up before shutting the door.

"Let me know if you need anything, my King. Now to go home to my wife and introduce this new one to her. I'm sure she will kick up a fuss but not to worry," he clicked his tongue and shook his head with a laugh.

"Lucky, I am Alpha right?" he sighed. I said nothing on the matter; it sickened me how he treated them as mere objects to please him.

"Thank you for your help; I will be in touch," I told him, glancing at Abbie, who was peering out the closed window up at the castle. Alpha Kade looks over his shoulder at her before looking back at me.

"Now, please don't be upset, my King, but in order to get her to come with me, I may have made a deal with her," he said, and I tilted my head to the side, observing him.

He had a slim face and beady eyes, a smirk played on his lips like he thought it funny he had to cut a deal with his own mate to get her to agree to go with him, which I knew any deal he did make would not be for herself. Abbie was much like Ivy in that regard. The only time I had seen her ask for anything was when she asked to go with her mate. Other than that, she never asked for anything unless it was for Ivy. Ivy!

"I told her I would, but I have no intention of stopping. I thought I should let you know your mate Ivy?" I nodded wanting to know what it is he agreed to for Abbie..

"She is supposed to meet us at the bridge leading out of town, I was supposed to smuggle her out, I agreed, of course, but I had no intentions of taking your Queen, but I thought I should let you know, we can't have runaway Queen now," Alpha Kade murmured while looking back at the car like he was worried Abbie may overhear. I growled and glared at him before clenching my jaw. Damian's hand fell on my shoulder, warning me not to lose it with Abbie present.

"I suggest you leave Alpha Kade. You never should have made that deal; you have potentially put my Queen at risk," Damian snarled while I fought the urge to shift and kill the bastard.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"She is probably along the river somewhere, my King. She was meeting us there at 7 PM." He answered, and I nodded. Alpha Kade quickly rushed back to the car. Abbie glanced at us nervously and I waved and played along waving back to her trying to keep my fury in check. I watched them leave and go out the gates. The moment they did, I turned on my heel to go find her and drag her back. Damian gripped my arm, making me come to a stop and my entire body trembled with the need to track her down.

"Calm down," he said, and I shrugged his arm.

"Fucking Find her," I bellowed through the link. As I ran for the river and shifted, Damian explained what had happened and howls filled the night sky.

"Kyson!" Damian bellowed through the link.

"How fucking dare she,"

"You need to calm down," he said before I saw him shift, running to catch up to me.

"I will calm down once she's back locked in her room. Who was supposed to be watching her?" I snarled, and I heard Dustin whimper through the mind link. I growled at him before shutting the link.

"We will find her, but please be rational about this my King, you scare her, she"

"She will be lucky if I don't chain her to my fucking bed, enough with your charter Damian. Fucking find my mate," I snapped and he nodded beside me. He runs toward the treeline and I pick up her scent along the river. Her scent pushes me harder as I track down my little mate and she would regret running from me.

Ivy POV

Abbie and I got changed and showered before she had to leave to speak with King about the arrangements made for her to leave. She squeezed me tight before she left and said, "Don't be late," before pecking my cheek.

I had been pacing ever since then, even when the servant brought my food up for dinner, I was much too nervous to eat it. Going to the cupboard I pulled on some warmer clothes and looked for some flat shoes I could run easily in. Moving toward the door, I cracked it open before fishing the small key out of my pocket. I had no idea how she got it and shook my head at how much trouble she would have got in if she had been caught. I dumped my food in the bin as I moved into the kitchen. A few kitchen staff lingered cleaning up but paid no attention to me as I moved around the kitchen, all too busy with the end-of-day tasks. I quickly retrieved a glass and poured a drink of water which was a terrible mistake because the moment I drank it, nerves got worse making me need to pee.

I wasted more time having to run to the servant's bathroom to quickly pee before walking back to the kitchens. Thankfully though the kitchen staff had left to eat their own dinner and I snuck out the back door into the laundry room. I rushed past all the shelves and the huge washers and dryers to the back door. Key in hand, I placed it in the lock before twisting it. A sigh of relief left me when I pulled the door open. The wind had picked up a little and the sky wasn't too overcast yet with the approaching storm. I slipped out carefully closing the door and then darted for cover under the fruit trees. I raced along them using them for cover, having to stop a few times until guards turned away before rushing over the hill and down through the graveyard to the river that ran along the back of the castle grounds.

Heading west I started running and keeping low until I was far enough away from the castle. I made sure to keep an eye on the time as I jogged along the river heading west as Abbie had said. Finally, I was going to be free, free of the castle, free of my mate, and free of the bond. No more of the King silently sitting in my room and making the bond play havoc, no more of his scent tormenting me. Excitement had me smiling as I thought of the possibilities my future could hold.

The sun was down by the time I got halfway. Glancing at the watch clutched in my hand that Abbie gave me, I checked the time once again. She said just run straight and follow the river, yet I saw no bridge or any roads up ahead.

Coming to a stop and clutching my knees, I try to catch my breath. I had been running for almost half an hour now and was already worn out. The Chill of the night air made goosebumps rise on my arms as the light left become blocked by the darkening clouds.

My teeth ached from running and my legs were sore yet I pushed to keep going, determined to find the spot her mate told her to tell me. Once the sun disappeared completely, worry bubbled in my stomach. I always hated the dark, and being out here alone and unable to shift set me further on edge and the smell of rain approaching didn't help.

My head whipped in every direction with every noise or break of twig I heard. Slowing slightly, I squinted into the distance and could just make out the bridge he mentioned to her. It was also that very moment that howls reached my ears coming from the direction of the castle.

My heart thumped erratically and I took off before hearing one so loud and angry it could not be mistaken for anyone other than the King. Panic seized me and I glanced ahead knowing that being by the water I was far too exposed. With that knowledge, I took off for the treeline, deciding to stay as near to the edge of the forest as possible so I didn't get lost but so I wouldn't be spotted out in the open of the clear space running either side of the river.

Adrenaline coursed through me as I took off, praying I made it to the bridge. Tears burned my eyes as the wind whipped my face making it sting. The sounds of running through the forest sent fear coursing through me. What took me half an hour to run took them only minutes to catch up to me. I could hear them in the woods and I skidded across the ground coming to a halt and falling on my side when a huge black Lycan with impenetrable eyes flashed between the trees in front of me.

His growl was furious as I scrambled backward trying to get to my feet, leaves, and the damp earth making it slippery as I heard the crunch of twigs beneath him as he stalked toward me. He growled at me, his teeth sharp gleaming, chilled my bones as he stalked closer heading toward me. His chest rose and fell heavily with his burning anger.

My scream hurt my own ears when he suddenly ran at me, my feet finally getting leverage on the ground and I sprinted off only to get about five steps when his weight hit my back shoving me forward in the dirt. The air in my lungs left me in a huff as I hit the ground yet his weight never landed on top of me.

Fear momentarily paralyzed me and I could feel the hair on his legs brush against mine, as he trapped me beneath him, caging me in, his hands on either side of my head.

The crunch of twigs had me look up to see Damian step out of the trees in just a pair of shorts. "Leave us," the King commanded and my eyes met Damian's fleetingly before he disappeared within the trees leaving me with the King. His chest rumbled with his growl against my back and he buried his nose in my neck making me whimper. Tears trekked down my cheeks as I tried to claw out from under him only for him to press his chest firmly against my back forcing me to the ground. His teeth nipped my shoulder making me cry out when I tried to move.

"You would dare try to leave me, to leave your King," he snarled next to my ear, his gravelly voice sending a shiver up my spine. My entire body shook beneath him, his aura slamming down on me, domineering and forcing another whimper to leave my lips. "You're mine, mine Ivy and you will remain with me, I will chain you to my damn bed if needed," he growled.

My claws slipped from my fingertips, enraged by his words although petrified at the same time. They dug into the earth and he snarled, nipping my shoulder and making me flinch as he broke my skin.

"Submit," he growled in a warning and I felt my eyes flicker before my own growl slipped out of me before I could stop it. My vision changed, illuminating the darkness and making my surroundings brighter. His hand fell on my shoulder, claws sinking in as his weight lifted before he flipped me on my back with a swift yank before dropping his weight against my abdomen and legs. Trapping me once again. His aura smashed against me and he roared in my face. "I said submit," he growled yet his words washed over me, and instead of a whimper, rage came out in the form of a growl.

"I am your fucking King, you will submit to me," he snarled, pressing his chest against mine.

"The same King who doesn't want me for a mate," I snarled back and my eyes flickered, my vision making his features clearer as my eyes adapted to the darkness, making everything look different, turning a luminescent blue which made his glare harden as his eyes examined my face. He used his nose turning my face, his fur brushing against my face before he snarled "You're mine," he shook with rage above me and the bond flared, making me angry.

"I'm not anymore," I growled at him and he roared in my face before punching the ground beside my face. I squeezed my eyes shut but refused to submit like his aura tried to make me, the feeling of it caressing over me made nausea build but I shoved it back, shocked at my own ability to not give in when I felt his tongue swipe across his bite marks on my shoulder and arm.

"You will submit, one way or another," he purred and I heard his bones start snapping and rearranging before his warm skin pressed against me. I felt the calling make my skin tingle as he forced the bond to the surface and I gasped that he would use it on me.

I screamed as he awoke the stupid calling and thrashed beneath him wanting him to stop, not wanting to submit to him when I felt the weight of it start to relax me and with a last ditch effort to stop him, I started hitting him and thrashing for him to get off me. He snarled, shoving the calling on me again as I scrambled, kicking my feet and pushing away and out from under him. He snarled, flashing his canines at me and my hand moved with speed I never thought possible and connected with his face. Only after they did that I realized my claws were out, razor-sharp as they slashed down his face.

Blood spilled and sprayed across my face and I gasped at what I'd done while his head whipped to

the side. The deep threatening growl that left him made my blood run cold as he slowly turned his face back to look at me. Deep claw marks streaked down his cheek, across his lips and over one of his eyelids. My bravado wore off immediately as he snarled before pouncing on me and crushing me beneath him. His blood dripped on me, covering me like a leaky faucet.

I whimpered waiting for him to tear into me when he purred, the calling washing over me and I sobbed as I felt my body go lax beneath him, giving in to his demands.

"Shh, my Queen," he whispered, burying his face in my neck.

"You're mine now," he purred before I felt his teeth pierce my skin. He sank them deep into my neck, through the layers of skin and tissue before I gasped as sparks rushed from head to toe, every inch of me tingling and my body felt foreign to me. Even my toes curled as immense pleasure washed through every part of my body and I felt him take something from me like he stole a piece of my soul as it embedded and transferred to him. My eyelids fluttered, heavy as the fight drained out of me before feeling his teeth slide out of my neck, and his tongue roll over my mark.

His calling got louder, taking everything, forcing me to relax while exhaustion like never before slivered through me. "Sleep my Queen, your King has got you," he purred and my head fell back as he scooped me up into his arms, his chest vibrating against me as he continued to purr clutching me close while I was entirely limp in his arms. He started walking nuzzling my neck as I tried to fight the exhaustion. Unable, I blinked once more and everything went black.

Kyson POV

Damian panicked the moment he saw me step into the foyer with her in my arms. Her blood ran down my arms, but the bleeding had slowed down. Ivy infuriated me; I wasn't supposed to mark her, but when she refused to submit, which caused me to lose control. She hadn't shifted yet, and now I could have put everything at risk. Damian's eye flew wide open when he noticed the blood trailing down my arms, and he tried to rip her away from me. I pulled her closer, and his arms dropped.

"I marked her, she is fine," I spat through gritted teeth, annoyed at how he went straight for her as if I had hurt fatally hurt her. He let out a breath, and his shoulders sagged.

"Not ideal, but we can work with that. Just means changing her will be harder and require a few attempts," Damian sighed. Ivy was like a rag-doll in my arms. Looking at her, you would think she was dead with how floppy her body was in my arms. Moving her around, I pulled her closer, so her head rested on my shoulder instead of craning back awkwardly.

"Help me get her upstairs," I told him, and he walked ahead, opening the doors for me before finally opening the bedroom one. I stopped, peering around my room before walking back out.

"What is it?" Damian asked, and I looked down the hall toward the other wing.

"I can't stay in there with her; I don't trust myself," I told him.

"Kyson, you can't just mark her and lock her away in her room and leave her there," Damian said, and I looked down at her in my arms.

"Just have them move my stuff tomorrow to hers, just not. It's Claire's old room; I can't," I told him before walking off toward her room.

"But you will stay with her. You will move back to your old quarters?" Damian asked.

"I said I would. I know I can't bloody leave her now; I fucking marked her."

"And you do not seem the least bit happy about that," Damian stated.

"She wouldn't submit, she.." I shook my head.

"Figured that by the claw marks down your face. Are you sure that is the only reason you marked her?" Damian asked, opening her bedroom door.

"Damian, stop. Just leave it be," he chuckled and shook his head.

"Whatever you say, my King," he added as I stepped through the threshold with her. I tugged her closer, and Damian moved toward the fire chucking another log in it before walking into the bathroom, and I heard the bath running. I glanced at him as he walked out, and he shrugged.

"What, do you plan on putting her to bed filthy and covered in blood and dirt?" he asked.

"I know what you're doing," I growl at him.

"And what is that, my King?" Damian smirked, and I narrowed my eyes at him, his lips tugging into a smirk. He knew exactly what he was doing, trying to force me to break down the walls of the bond. He knew the more time spent with her would awaken the bond, awaken her shift.

"Don't play dumb," I snap at him before looking down at her. She was filthy, mud matted in her hair, and her porcelain skin now stained red. Blood drenched my chest, neck, and face from her claw marks, and I sighed.

"I will have some clothes sent over for you," Damian said before turning and walking out of the room. Biting the inside of my lip before I sighed, I moved toward the bathroom before sitting on the edge of the giant bathtub with Ivy on my lap. Quickly stripping her bare, I looked away from her naked body, my urges tempted to taste her flesh and smother her in my scent. The bond may be weak for her, but it had never been stronger for me, especially as I felt her essence weave through mine. Reaching over, I shut the taps off before stepping into the bath and settling her on my lap, making sure to keep her head above water. Her back rested against my chest. Reaching for a cloth, I begin to wash her.

Not once did she stir as I cleaned her, her mark still weeping with blood as it tried to heal. It wasn't until Damian cleared his throat from the bathroom doorway, his back turned slightly, that I realized I was licking her. I shook my head, not remembering when I gave myself over to instinct. Her neck and face were completely cleaned, and I glared at the ceiling. A growl slipped from me at Damian's following words.

"Does she taste good, my king?" he taunted.

"Are you trying to irritate me on purpose? I didn't fucking realize I was doing it until you made a noise." I snapped back.

"Instinct shouldn't be ignored," Damian said simply. That was easy for him to say, he hadn't found his mate, and his probably wasn't a traitor.

"Clothes are on the bed, towels by the sink," he said, walking out. I glanced at the sink basin and shook my head before reluctantly climbing out and bringing Ivy with me. What a mission it was trying to dry her and me when she had no movement. Giving up on trying to dress her after pulling one of my shirts over her head, I laid her on the bed, tugging the blankets up over her before pulling on the shorts Damian brought in for me.

Moving back to the bathroom, I examined my face. Her claw marks were deep, especially across my cheek and temple. Prodding it, it started bleeding, and I grabbed a hand towel, pressing it against it as I walked back out of the bathroom. Grabbing her hand, I examined her fingers.

Wondering how she managed to claw me up so badly. Werewolf claws could do some damage, but it was like I slashed with a knife, not werewolf claws. The only damage that caused this sort of destruction to a Lycan was usually caused by another Lycan's claws. Placing her hand down, I moved toward my old bar, searching for liquor. Finding none, I called for Dustin to retrieve it for me along with a set of handcuffs before settling on the couch by the fire; I turned my chair, so I could see her while I waited for him.

A few hours later, with a whiskey in my hand, I watched her. For some reason, I couldn't get the look of her eyes out of my head, how they glowed, and her strength as she struggled. She must have been angry because it took nearly all my strength for me to subdue her. The other thing that bothered me was how she was able to resist my command in her anger. The calling she stood no chance against, but my command she fought. I was puzzled by it. Ivy had strength that was more than what a werewolf should have, and fought my command, yet couldn't fight the calling; I kept trying to tell myself it was because she was my mate, yet something nagged at me as I pondered.

The sun was just peeking out along the horizon when I finally climbed into the bed next to her; she stirred and rolled into me, and I growled at her touch, her small hands pressing into my side seeking me out before I noticed she was still unconscious and just reacting to the bond. Reaching over to the bedside table, I grabbed the handcuffs from where I placed them before clamping it on her wrist and securing it to the headboard.

I couldn't risk her waking before me and trying to run again, though now there was no place she could run or hide from me. Not while my mark lay etched into her skin. She would learn her place is with me and whatever I choose to do with her rests with me. She had no choice. It wasn't hers, so until she learned that, then I would make the choices for both of us. Settling back beside her, I rested my head on the pillow and closed my eyes.

It only took moments for sleep to take me with her by my side, and I welcomed sleep. Not really get complete sleep since I forced her out of the castle, but with her beside me snuggled into me and her scent wrapping around me, I was plunged into oblivion.

Ivy POV

My muscles ached as I blinked up at the ceiling. My head hurt, and I felt groggy as I rolled in the bed. Yet when I went to move my hand to rub my eyes, something cold and metal caught my wrist.

Tilting my head up, I found one hand was cuffed to the headboard. I gasped, jerking on my trapped wrist, yet the handcuff wouldn't loosen. Panic seized me as the events of yesterday flooded back to me all at once. My lungs felt restricted, and I struggled to breathe when my other hand went to my neck.

My fingertips tingled, and the sight stung a little as I remembered he marked me. His threat to tie me to the bed came back to me, and my eyes scanned the room for him, but I saw him nowhere. By the light outside, it was around midday, and I struggled against the restraint, the metal digging in and bruising my wrist as I tried to free myself.

Warm tears streamed down my cheeks. He trapped me. He confined me to the bed and had now marked me. A sob tore out of me at how it appeared to be nothing for him to do this to me, that he would do this as I yanked my arm when I heard the door open. I turned my head, making me pivot to face it when his scent wafted over to me. The King walked in and glanced at me and my attempt to escape.

"Wouldn't be necessary, but I don't trust you," he said while walking over to the bar area. He had a book in his hand, and he watched me as he poured himself a drink before setting the book on the coffee table and sitting in the armchair.

"You tried to leave," he said simply like it explained his harsh treatment. Yet all I could think of was the number of times Mrs. Daley trapped or locked us away. I had confinement and was extremely claustrophobic. Despite the size of the room, being trapped on the bed and unable to use that hand made it feel tiny like the walls were pressing closer and threatening to crush me.

"You're scared," he stated, sipping his drink and watching me over the rim.

"Let me go, Kyson," I stammered.

"Never, Ivy. What part of you are mine did you have trouble understanding? Did you think being fated to a King you could just leave and there would be no consequences?" he asked. I glared at him. Although my sudden anger didn't stop the tears from sliding down my face or the feeling of unease at being trapped. His presence simply made me more nervous. I turned my gaze to the closet before lying back down on my side.

The sound of his glass clinking, being placed on the coffee table, and his footsteps growing nearer told me he was walking toward me. "You can't just leave; the bond won't allow it, not for me anyway," he said as he came over and stood at the edge of the bed.

"Then reject me and be done with it," I told him.

"Lycans can't reject their mates. I couldn't even if I wanted to. And I don't want to," he said, though with the way he said it, it was like he was trying to convince himself he wanted me. So it was not at all promising on my part. Nor did it offer me any form of hope.

"I will remove the handcuffs when I feel you can be trusted, and right now, through the bond, all I can feel is your anger, Ivy. Until I no longer feel it, you will remain handcuffed understood," The king said firmly, like he was scolding a child and not his mate. Words failed me when I felt his fingertips grip my chin and tilt my face to look up at him.

My claw marks on his face healed, but they did leave faint scarring, which on him only added more character and did nothing to deter from his god-like good looks.

"All you had to do was submit, but since you didn't, I can't guarantee you won't try to run again," he said while his thumb brushed over my lips; I jerked my head away, and he sighed.

"You will learn one way or another, Ivy. There is no escaping the bond and won't escape me again," he said before walking away and back to his whiskey.

For most of the day, he sat around reading while I stared at the closet door, trying to stop the memories from the orphanage, memories of being tied up with my hands behind my back and tied to my feet. Yet one thing with silence was your mind; your mind takes you to places you wished you could forget, convincing you that you were still stuck there. Only now, I didn't have Abbie whispering beside me to keep me sane. No, now I only had the King's silence, and it was deafening.

My muscles ached from not walking, and I needed to pee. No sooner than I thought he was beside me undoing the handcuffs. "Go," he said, nodding toward the bathroom.

"You forget I can feel you, Ivy, now hurry up,"

"Then, if that were true, you wouldn't have me handcuffed to the damn bed." he seemed perplexed, and I stumbled over my own feet as I climbed off the bed before rushing to the bathroom.

When I came out, my eyes instantly went to the handcuffs in his hand as he stood waiting by the door. My heart rate picked up, and he tilted his head to the side while he observed me.

"I thought you were scared of me," he says, holding the handcuffs up, and my heart lurched in my chest, pumping frantically. He watched me for a second before looking at the handcuffs.

"But these scare you?" he said before scrubbing a hand down his face. He sighed and bit his lip as he thought for a second. I stood on the spot, shifting my weight from one foot to the other, waiting for him to force the cuffs back on me.

"You run from me. I will lock you in the cells under the castle, or I put you back in these," he warns, and I nod my head. He curses under his breath, shaking his head before tossing the handcuffs on the bed.

"One chance, Ivy. So don't ruin it. I don't enjoy punishing you," he said before sitting on the edge of the bed. For someone who doesn't like punishing me, he seemed to do it an awful lot lately.

"Then don't give me a reason to," I tell him, and he looks over at me. A growl escaped him before he reached forward, his long fingers wrapped around my wrist before I was yanked forward against him. The King moved so quickly I didn't even have a chance to catch my breath before I found myself back on the bed with him pressed on top of me.

"You can be a stubborn little thing," he growled before I felt the calling seize me in its grip. His hands locked around my wrists before he tugged them above my head and held them in one of his, pinning me beneath him. His chest vibrated against mine. Drawing out a side of me, I was beginning to hate.

The King ran his nose across my cheek, inhaling my scent before stopping at my ear. "You can fight me all you want, Ivy, but I can use one thing you can't, or do you need a reminder?" he purred before running his tongue across the seam of my lips. The moan that left me angered me as my body relaxed beneath him, giving in to his demands; as he received the reaction he wanted out of me, tears pricked

and burned the back of my eyes.

"I don't want to force you; I have told you this, so please don't make me. I don't want to be that sort of monster," he whispered against my lips before nipping at them. The King thrust his hips against my barely clothed body. The feel of him, his hardened length pressing between my thighs, made me moan but also whimper, knowing if he wanted, he could use the calling to make me submit to him, make me give myself to him.

"See, Ivy. I have control, don't make me abuse it. I don't want that, and I know you don't," he growled before dropping it, the overwhelming feeling suddenly extinguished. He hovered above me for a few seconds, and his eyes flickered, his body trembling like he was fighting a war within himself while I battled my own.

"Tread carefully, Ivy. You don't want me to snap," he growled before rolling off me. The moment he did, my entire body shuddered like it was going through withdrawals. It took everything in me not to throw myself at him and rub myself on him, needing his skin, wanting to bite him. He smirked before his face fell when I didn't give in to the urges, my anger at him overshadowing them, and I gritted my teeth.

"You're fighting it," he snarled.

"You would rather be in pain?" he asked.

"I used to love it when you did that. Now you just made me hate it because you took my choice. You promised I would have a choice," I tell him. He looked away from me, and I saw him swallow.

"Then don't make me take them. Stop fighting the bond and don't run from me again."

"You're a hypocrite. You say don't fight it or deny the bond, but you broke mine, you broke me. I won't allow you to do it a second time," I screamed at him so angrily I felt breathless. He seemed startled by my outburst before getting up and storming toward the door.

"You try to leave this room before I say you will find yourself in the cells," he snapped. The King then walked out and slammed the door behind him. I jumped at the bang, the bond flaring to life, making me want to chase after him and beg for his forgiveness. It took me days to have the bond ease and let me breathe again, and it took him only seconds to force it back. One bite and he was destroying me all over again.

Only now do I recognize the signs and the influence he had over me. The twisted way the bond works against me. It wasn't fair, and with Abbie gone, I don't think I could suffer the push and pull from the bond, suffer through losing it again if he so chooses. Yet I was determined to try because one thing became startlingly obvious: he was fighting the bond just as much as I now was. He had the calling, but I wasn't entirely powerless. I had the bond on my side and if he wants to break me, I would make sure he broke too.

The next few days went the same, the King forcing me to go with him wherever he went, forcing me to follow around like a lost puppy. I stared longingly out toward the forest through his office window at Clarice and Peter. Peter had a bucket and a scrubbing brush in his hand. Clarice was talking to him, and she looked like she was about to hang out the washing. I pressed my forehead against the cool glass. Fresh air would be good, anything to get away from the King or guards, even if only for a few moments.

"I will take you outside later," the King said, and I peered over at him. He stared down at his laptop screen, not paying any attention to me whatsoever. For the most part, we ignored each other. However, I could see he was becoming bothered by it. It was almost as if he was picking fights with me when we did talk, just to give him a reason to grab me or touch me.

He never hurt me, but I don't believe that was his intention, anyway. The bond drew him closer to me and Damian had admitted that is why the King drinks the way he does; to fight off the urges for him to give in to the bond, something I have refused to do myself. I had also been refusing to sleep in the bed with him even though I could hear him pacing because of it. It gave me a sick satisfaction that it disturbed him. Like I was winning at something. Though it pained me refusing him, I was becoming desensitized to the pain.

He couldn't complain about it because he said I couldn't leave the room, and technically I hadn't or tried to, so he had no reason to force me into bed with him or use the calling on me though, I could see the temptation too clearly on his face.

"Can I ring Abbie?" I asked, and he peered over the laptop screen at where I was sitting.

"You tried her earlier, and she never picked up. You may try tonight, and if she doesn't answer, I will ring her mate, so you can speak with her, that is if you behave and eat tonight," he adds. I turn my gaze away and glare out the window. I have had no appetite since being back. Just the smell of food makes me want to throw up.

"Can you go help, Clarice?" I asked.

"No, I am busy," he growled and chewed my lip. It was boring sitting here and that's all I ever seemed to do, sit around and wait for him to drag me somewhere else.

"Damian can take me," I told him, and he sighed, sitting back in his chair and staring over at me.

"Damian and Gannon are working; I can't pull them away from their duties just because you're bored, Ivy," he said. A growl slipped from me, and he folded his arms across his chest and arched an eyebrow at me before pressing his full lips in a line. My eyes stared at them and I had to pull my gaze away from them, making me lick mine. Something I noticed he did when he was debating with himself and not liking his own trail of thoughts.

Standing up, he watched me as I made my way over to him before stopping next to his desk; he swiveled in his chair to face me straight on like he thought I was about to make a run for the door when I noticed his computer screen. Noticing my gaze, he glanced back at the beautiful woman on the screen and hurt rushed through me. There were lots of them, all tiny pictures of women displayed in different states of undress and posing for the camera.

"It's not what you think," he murmured, and I looked at him. He reached for me, but I jerked my hand away. Had been sitting here this entire time looking at other women while I sat across from him.

"Ivy, come here," he snarled, leaning forward and wrapping his fingers around my wrist. He pulled me on his lap before locking his arm around my waist when I tried to get up, and he nipped my shoulder with his teeth.

"I'll show you, stop," he growled.

"I don't want to see your side pieces," I snapped at him, and his arm around my waist tightened, and his growl turned menacing as he pressed his teeth against the back of my neck.

"I don't have side pieces, only you. Now stop it," he snapped before moving the mouse around and clicking on one. I growled. I couldn't help it until it clicked open, and then the screen opened up to her mutilated body. My stomach lurched, and I looked away, my heart thumping in my ears loudly and my eyes wide in horror.

"Are you still jealous of a dead woman?" Kyson asked as I turned away, unable to handle looking at the screen.

"Get rid of it," I whispered as tears burned and stung my eyes at the thought of what she endured to look like that.

"I clicked out of another file. I didn't think about the picture on it, or I would have shut the screen completely down."

"Why are they all half-naked? Did they not have better pictures?" I said, wiping a stray tear. I couldn't get the image out of my head. The way she was torn apart and the look of anguish in her dead eyes.

"Unfortunately, no, their owners didn't take normal pictures they wouldn't sell,' The King said.

"Wouldn't sell?" I asked.

"Yes, these women are rogue sex slaves, Ivy. We have been trying to find out where they are kept, and we also believe the children's bodies that have been washing up belong to some of these women, we know the hunters are behind it, yet we don't know why so many are suddenly popping up,"

"The children you buried the other week?" he nods before dropping his chin on my shoulder.

"Who would do such a thing?" I murmured, staring back at the women.

"Some very sick individuals, unfortunately, the hunters have help, we have found a few of the rebels' insignia patches too along with the bodies," he reached over to the drawer beside him and pulled out a sandwich bag full of fabric patches. He dropped it on the desk and I picked it up. The moment I turned it over, I gasped and clutched my ears.

I found myself submerged in the noise of the new surroundings that became deafening as I struggled to take it in. The fear that coursed through me. At the forefront of my mind, I suddenly perceived a memory arising from a time I wished to stay forgotten. Suddenly, the sounds of gunfire could be heard resounding in the air around me.

"It's ok, come on out, come to Mummy," my mother whispered. My mother's blood-encrusted hands reached toward me. In my attempt to drown out the sound of gunshots, I tried to hide in what appeared to be a cupboard, my hands covering my ears. In what appeared to be a cleaner's uniform, my mother had a patch across her heart that was sewn into the uniform. Blood soiled the front, and her skin was tainted in it.

'Come on, Ivy, I would like you to come to me," my mother said, and I didn't want to go with her, for some reason, she scared me but reluctantly I placed my hand in hers, and she pulled me out into the carnage. The memory fizzled and warped before I found myself breathing heavily as I tried to get my bearings. She was one of them. She really did do the horrible things she was accused of.

"Ivy, what is it?" Kyson asked, clutching me tighter against him while I tugged on my hair, needing the pain to make it stop, to ground me back to the present.

"Ivy, you're scaring me. Speak to me," the King said as I began to have a panic attack. My lungs refused to work as I tried to suck in a breath when I felt the calling sweep over me. His deep purr emanated from him, forcing me to relax against him, and I let out a shaky breath, pressing closer and seeking it out.

"What happened?" he murmured, but I shook my head, not wanting to remember instead wanting to forget.

"She really did it, didn't she?" I whispered as tears blurred my vision.

"Who?"

"My mother," I choked, and he growled, his arms growing tighter, and I could feel the tremble of his arms as he gripped me. Trying to reign in his anger toward her and for me being hers.

"The patch triggered something?" he asked, unable to keep his anger from his voice, though his purring never stopped, and I nodded against his chest. He nodded his head but said nothing instead, letting me calm down.

"Come on, I will take you back to the room." I shook my head and pressed the sharp points of his teeth against my shoulder. I shuddered, but he seemed to merely do it as if to tell me he was still there like I had somehow forgotten he was holding me.

"I will see if Gannon or Damian will take you for a walk then I have work to do. So I can't right now," he

whispered into my hair. The King only took a few minutes before he sighed, and I sat up.

"They're busy; I will get someone to grab a pillow and blanket. You can rest on the couch until I'm done," I chewed my lip, suddenly embarrassed over my breakdown. I was meant to be avoiding the bond, not seeking it.

I looked longingly out the window, wanting to go outside. This room all of a sudden felt stuffy and closed in. "I won't run," I whispered before looking back at the King.

He was watching me, his chin rested on his hand thoughtfully. "Ivy, I can't-

"How are you going to trust me if you don't let me earn it?" I asked, and he worried his lip between his teeth before pinching the bridge of his nose.

"I will check in with Clarice every hour, I promise." I pleaded.

"Half an hour, if you are so much as a minute late. I will send the entire castle out to hunt you down," he warned, gripping my chin and forcing me to meet his gaze.

"I let you go by yourself. You sleep in the bed with me?" he asked, tilting my chin to the side and watching me. My guess was that he was trying to see if I was trying to deceive him.

"Promise me, I need sleep, and I can't with you sleeping on the goddamn couch," he said, and I pulled away from him.

"I need an answer, Ivy, or you don't go," he said. I sighed, but I really needed out of this room. Without him breathing down my neck, I needed to breathe for a few minutes. But most of all, I wanted to feel free, even if it was only momentarily, so I nodded and agreed to his request.

"Then you can go; I will come to find you when I am done," he says, and I get up off his lap. Moving toward the door, he speaks, "And Ivy." I stop looking back at him.

"Check in with Clarice,"

"Yes, every half an hour," I finished for him, and he nodded before allowing me to go. I quickly escape downstairs. Stepping out, I sighed a breath of relief. Today it was pretty warm, and the sun felt nice on my cold skin. Clarice was hanging the last sheet on the clothesline, however, Peter was nowhere to be found.

"Where did Peter go?" I asked her and she jumped from not hearing me come up behind her. "Gosh, my Queen, you gave me a fright," she said, clutching her hand that held two pegs to her chest.

"Sorry, is Peter around?" I asked.

"Down at the cemetery. Where is the King?" She asked, glancing around nervously. The entire castle was aware I was in lockdown and under strict guard, so it must have worried her seeing me without someone.

"He let me out, but I have to check up with you every half an hour," I growled.

"Right, well, Peter is busy. Although, I am sure he would love the company. Little shit tried to rope me into helping him." she chuckled. I nodded before making my way down to the graveyard.

It took me a good few minutes to spot him kneeling behind a huge headstone. Wandering over to him, he looked up when my shadow cast over him.

"Ivy, I mean my Queen," he said, baring his neck to me.

"Ivy is fine," I tell him, and he lets out a breath.

"So can I help you with something?" he asked, and I shrugged, looking down at what he was doing. He was scrubbing and cleaning the headstones and removing the dead flowers.

"Want some help?" I asked, and he chewed his lip before peering over the headstone and glancing at the castle. "Are you allowed?" He whispered, and I peered back over at the castle.

"Yes, I don't see why not," I shrugged.

"Well, I am nearly done with this row. If you grab another bucket and brush, you'll also need a polishing rag," he said, showing me his tucked into his belt. Nodding, I turned and walked back toward the castle.

"In the laundry room, Ivy," he called, and I nodded, going in search of the cleaning supplies.

Retrieving what I needed, I earned a few strange stares from those working in the laundry, but they said nothing or questioned me as I slipped back out with everything. Making my way back to Peter, he was in the next row and stood up, coming over to me.

"Where do you want me?" I asked him, and he looked around.

"Um, well, you could start in the middle. Those are pretty old though and require more scrubbing, or there is the servant's cemetery over there," he said, pointing closest to the forest and castle. "Or the hunters and rebels' victims are the ones nearest the river." He says before looking at me.

"Hunters and rebels victims?"

"Yes, most of those killed by rebel leaders Marrissa and Darclay, Marissa was a rogue werewolf she killed the King's sister and that um, the royal family, they live, yeah I don't know hours out that-away," he said, pointing toward the forest.

"Darclay, was the human head hunter that recruited her," Peter rambled on to say, yet I was still stuck at the mention of my mother's name. Did Peter not know why the King kicked me out of the castle?

"How many are there?" I asked, looking out at the spanning field of graves.

"From the hunters? Though most kills came from Marrissa, she would pretend to be a servant and then kill everyone while they were sleeping. Most of those are from her, about 211 last time I counted," he shrugged.

211! When I heard that all those lives had been lost, and because my mother was behind it all, I was sick to my stomach.

"Yep, she was the worst Lycan serial killer in history," Peter said grimly.

"The King never got over it; he found his sister, and Marrissa cut her unborn child out of her and mutilated her before stuffing her back in her womb. Well, that's what I heard anyway from Trey; he is