

Chapter 31

Abbie

My sense of time slips away, and it is only when Kade shakes my shoulder that I snap back to reality, startled by his touch. “We have arrived, my love,” he murmurs, and I blink, disoriented.

Already? I cast my gaze about, taking in the late hour and the unfamiliar surroundings. This is not the grand packhouse Kade described to me; there are no sprawling gardens, no elegant fountains, no tall hedges. Instead, my eyes land on a dilapidated cabin, nestled in isolation, surrounded by an imposing forest. I thought he was supposed to be Alpha of some great pack.

Confusion fills me as I inquire, “Where are we?” The desolation of this place is palpable.

“It’s a safe house,” Kade explains, his voice tinged with concern. “We have been experiencing troubles with neighboring packs. We cannot risk alerting them to your

presence. It would put you in grave danger.” I furrow my brows, about to voice my worries when he steps out of the car without another word. The wind bites at his figure as he circles around to open my door. I step out, rubbing my arms for warmth before retrieving my bag.

“How long will we be staying here?” I inquire, my eyes tracing the tiny porch with its uneven slope and the door that bears the signs of weathered neglect—a gaping crack and a missing chunk from the bottom corner.

“You will remain here until we can resolve the conflict with the other pack,” he replies, fumbling with his keys.

“But...you won’t be staying with me?” I question, glancing apprehensively into the shadows cast by the looming trees.

“No,” he responds gently, his eyes filled with regret. “I must return home to maintain appearances. If I do not, they may grow suspicious and come searching for me. It would not be safe for you.” The weight of his words settles upon me as a deep pit grows in my stomach.

“But is this place truly safe?” I ask, seeking reassurances. It sure doesn’t look safe. He nods, his expression solemn.

“For the time being, it is,” he assures me. “I will stay for a while longer to ensure your comfort. My men have stocked everything you may need. Come, let me show you inside.” Urging me to follow him, he unlocks the stubborn door with a few firm kicks, its swollen frame revealing the damage inflicted by water. As I step inside, the disarray of the cabin assaults my senses, litter strewn about like remnants of forgotten lives, reminiscent of abandoned buildings I encountered near the orphanage.

Within the confines of this forsaken dwelling, a double bed—or perhaps a worn futon—occupies the space, its mattress heavily stained. Kade flicks on the lights, their feeble glow flickering as he moves toward the minuscule kitchen, so cramped I could easily stretch my leg from the bed to touch the counter. He returns with a box of matches, placing them in my hands.

“I must depart now, but I shall return tomorrow,” he informs me. “Firewood can be found at the back; you may need to chop some for yourself. Fresh bed linens are over there, and there is food in the pantry and fridge.”

“Wait,” I plead desperately. “Can you help me start the fire? I’ve always been dreadful at it. Either Gannon, Liam, Dustin,

or sometimes Damian would always take care of it back in my little room at home.”

“Don’t be silly,” Kade dismisses kindly. “It is dreadfully late, and I must hurry home to shower for work. You will manage just fine for one night. I will return around lunchtime tomorrow.”

“Please, let me come with you. You can sneak me into the pack house. No one will see me; it’s late night, no one will be up at this hour,” I tell him, not wanting to stay here by myself.

“Abbie, love. I need to go. I haven’t got time for theatrics. Behave, and I’ll be back tomorrow.”

With those words, he kisses my forehead before turning to leave me here. I survey my surroundings, settling onto the creaking mattress that digs into my backside. The chill in the air seeps into my bones, causing them to ache.

I glance around, sitting on the creaky old mattress, the springs digging into my backside. It’s freezing here, so cold my breath makes clouds in the air.

I will myself to get up and start the fire. After mere moments of sitting, the cold seeps deep into my bones, making them ache from the inside out. Too cold to even start a fire, I reach for the sheets and blankets huddling beneath them and pull my phone from my bag. Switching on the screen, I sigh wearily, realizing it is far too late to call Gannon and disturb his slumber. Instead, I replay his messages, his voice filled with longing and telling me to call him.

As I lie there in the frigid cabin, I can't help but wish for the comfort of Gannon's presence and the warming fires of the castle. The weight of solitude settles upon me, amplified by the biting cold that lingers in the air.