

Chapter 20

AZALEA

The jostling sensation of movement rouses me from my slumber, my eyelids fluttering open to take in the unfamiliar surroundings. As the fog of sleep dissipates, the memories of the previous night slowly trickle back into my consciousness. I find myself cradled in Kyson's arms as he carries me.

The warmth radiating from his body seeps into my bones, easing the residual wooziness that clings to me like a haze.

I release a shaky breath, my gaze meeting Kyson's intense eyes as he gazes down at me. With a gentle motion, he lifts me higher, his face burying in the crook of my neck as he inhales deeply. My hand instinctively finds its place on the side of his neck, fingers lightly grazing the skin, and a sense of calm washes over me. The wired and jittery feeling that had coiled within me begins to unwind, replaced by a soothing peace.

He moves me, allowing me to wrap my legs around his waist, and I laze against him.

“Thank the goddess,” Kyson breathes, his voice laced with relief and concern.

“I feel better,” I murmur, a yawn escaping my lips. Yet beneath the surface, anger pulses through our bond, radiating from Kyson like an electric storm. Sensing the turmoil within him, I pull my face away from his neck to stare at him, feeling his aura crackling with pent-up fury.

“What’s wrong?” I inquire, my voice laced with genuine concern.

“Someone tried to poison you,” Kyson reveals, his tone filled with determination. “I promise I will figure out who soon. Until then, you are to remain with Dustin or me.”

In confusion I knit my brows together, trying to comprehend it. Why would someone want to harm me? I’ve done nothing to anyone here. Although the gravity of the situation should have sent shivers down my spine, a peculiar distraction captivates my thoughts. My instincts, normally so attuned to danger and survival, seem to be in a state of disarray. No matter how hard I try to focus on the gravity of the situation, all I can think about is the overwhelming desire to taste Kyson.

My instincts are going berserk. No matter how much I try to focus on what he is telling me, all I want to do is lick him.

Carrying me effortlessly, Kyson leads me to our bedroom. Though perfectly capable of walking on my own, an inexplicable yearning keeps me clinging to him, relishing in his warmth and intoxicating scent. My hand absently rubs the center of his chest, eliciting a chuckle from him.

“Something you want?” he asks, amusement etched into his features.

“You,” I reply simply, my voice laced with need. My instincts swirl chaotically within me, demanding the presence of my mate. Before I can restrain myself, my teeth sink into his chest through his shirt, my claws finding purchase in his shoulder as others claw at his pec through the fabric.

A grunt escapes Kyson as he hoists me higher, making me want to climb into his shirt.

“Your scent is changing,” he purrs, nipping at the mark on my neck as I continue to explore the taste of his skin. A shudder ripples through his body as he tightens his grip on me.

Finally stepping into our room, Kyson kicks the door shut with a deft movement of his foot. “You should rest; you had an eventful night, and Abbie will be calling this morning,” he says, moving toward the bed and gently placing me down on its soft surface.

He attempts to stand, but I swiftly wrap my legs around his waist, tugging him closer. My teeth break through his collarbone, drawing another growl from him and he starts to purr, the calling wrapping around me, and my claws slip out, shredding his shirt even more.

Kyson presses his weight down on me, the calling, the low rumble emanating from his chest as he rolls onto his back, pulling me on top of him. My lips trail over his chest, tracing a path of possessiveness, while his hands move with gentle precision up and down my arms and sides. I revel in the sensation of mauling him, my teeth seeking purchase wherever they can find it. His chin drops as I attack his neck, his stubble grazing my cheek, and a primal growl escapes me when he denies me the satisfaction of marking him.

“I thought you wanted to speak to Abbie?” he murmurs, kissing the side of my mouth. Abbie, it has something to do with Abbie and it’s important; I just can’t remember why. My tongue rolls over his chest, my hands clawing at his flesh.

“She should be calling soon, Azalea,” he reminds me gently, his voice laced with patience and my teeth nip at him, making him groan.

Abbie...remember the thing about Abbie. What is it again? My tongue glides over his chest, soothing the marks I have left behind, while Kyson’s scars remain.

A flicker of confusion passes through me as I realize that not all wounds heal at the same pace.

It is soon once again forgotten, my sole focus on my desperate need to mark him. I can't think of anything but wanting to crawl inside the man. Desire courses through me so strongly I can't think of anything else.

"Love, Abbie. She is calling soon," Kyson growls, nipping at my shoulder. I try to shake the fog, consuming me and muddling my thoughts. Kyson smashes me with the calling, and I melt against him, pressing my ear to his chest and listening to the sound emanating from him.

"Shh, Abbie is calling soon. You want to speak to her, remember?" Kyson says softly, the calling growing stronger and making my eyelids heavy. I yawn, pressing my face into his chest.

"Abbie! Think of Abbie, Azalea. If you don't answer her call, I don't want you to hate me for missing it, so you need to focus. You can mark me afterward," he purrs, kissing the top of my head. His finger strokes my hair. My claws slip out of his chest as his calling turns to a sedative.

"That's it, plenty of time for that later, but calm," he purrs, his fingers moving from my hair and trailing up and down my spine. I blink, fighting the urge to sleep, trying to fight the calling, and my breathing becomes harsher.

“That’s it, love. Fight it. You can fight your urges; just focus on a different emotion or think of Abbie,” Kyson says. My brain feels like mush.

“Abbie is with Kade.”

I blink, the fog in my mind dissipating like a morning mist as I remember I am waiting for Abbie’s call. The name Kade slips into my thoughts, igniting a fierce growl that reverberates through me. The mere mention of his name fuels a surge of hatred within me, even though I have not yet met him.

I sit up, blinking, my claws sinking into his chest, and he hisses. I stare down at my hands, and Kyson pulls my claws out, and his blood oozes down his side. I move to lick his wounds, wanting to heal them.

“It’s fine.”

I cut his words off, running my tongue over the puncture marks. They heal instantly, and I have no idea how I did it, but I can tell my saliva has changed. It tastes different on my tongue. Kyson looks at his chest. The scars remain, which I find odd. They are fresh wounds and should have healed completely. I glance at his face to see the faint scars from the other night.

“You’re not healing, it scarred you?” I murmur.

“Worry about that later. It is because you were angry. See, these healed just fine,” he says, pointing to the love bites I gave him. It makes no sense why they would heal so unevenly. They all should have healed. I pinch my brows together when his calling slips out once more.

“That’s it, just focus on something else.”

I blink. Clarity washes through me like a tidal wave as I remember I am waiting for Abbie’s call, Kade slipping into my thoughts.

“What time is it?”

“Just after 10 AM, so she should be calling any minute,” Kyson says, lifting his hips and pulling his phone from his back pocket, handing it to me.

“Do you remember how to answer it?”

I nod, unlocking the phone and climbing off him. The moment I do, I immediately feel pulled back to him. I look at the phone in my hand and at Kyson on the bed. It’s like a war in my head between what the bond wants and what I need, and that is to ensure Abbie was okay.

“Focus, think of Abbie.”

I nod. It is difficult to keep a coherent thought. However, I'm glad Kyson ignored his instincts to let me mark him, knowing I will regret it if I miss Abbie's call. Then the phone rings in my hand, and Kyson, seeing me struggle, moves quickly, answering it, and her face pops up on the screen, snapping me out of my inner battle.

"Abbie!"

"Hey, Kade said you wanted me to call; I dropped my phone in the sink. You know I'm clumsy," she chuckles.

I furrow my brows. Abbie isn't clumsy.

"Have you got makeup on?" I ask her, staring at her face, trying to figure out why it looks different. The urges coursing through me instantly stifle as I scrutinize her appearance. Abbie is far from girly, so her wearing a thick coat of makeup is beyond strange. Something feels off.

"Yep, do you like it? Cassandra helped me," she says, turning the phone, and I see a woman who looks like she just stepped out of some magazine. Her face is made up perfectly and she looks immaculate. The woman smiles and waves enthusiastically before Abbie turns the phone back to herself.

"How have you been?" she asks, and I don't miss how her eyes move to someone past the phone. Kyson walks into the bathroom, and I move to the couch.

“Cassandra, that is—” I ask.

“Kade’s wife, they have three kids,” Abbie says, cutting me off and smiling, yet something doesn’t feel right; her eyes aren’t lighting up the way they usually do.

“And you’re okay with that?” I ask her.

“Well, I can’t punish him for marrying before he found me,” she says. I squint at her, and Abbie then changes the topic of conversation, asking me questions this time. Eager to hear more about what’s going on with her, I ask about the packhouse, but get only vague answers in response. Kyson comes up behind me and into the camera view.

“Hi Abbie, you look nice,” Kyson says, sending her a wave. She smiles and waves, saying hello. At face value, she seems like her normal, bubbly self. But something is off. Kade says a quick hello over Abbie’s shoulder.

“Well, my King and Queen, Abbie and Cassandra are about to go shopping,” he says.

I nod, and he moves away from the camera’s view. I can hear him talking to someone but can’t quite make out what he’s saying. Kyson has turned his attention to the tablet I was using last night, checking my writing.

“Well, I will try to call you again soon,” Abbie says.

“I was going to ask if you wanted to come up on the weekend?” I ask her, and I see Kyson look at me out of the corner of my eye.

“That would be wonderful; I have missed you,” Abbie says, her eyes lighting up for the first time.

“Not this weekend, Abbie. A driver won’t be available,” I hear Kade say somewhere off the side.

“It’s fine. I will send Dustin to come to get her and your wife, be a girl’s weekend,” I tell him. Not that I want to see his wife, but I know it might seem suspicious if I don’t invite her too.

“The kids have a soccer match, and it’s Abbie’s first one. She doesn’t want to miss it,” Kade says, and Abbie nods before rubbing behind her ear.

“Yes, I promised the kids I would go; I forgot. Maybe the one after,” she smiles, yet my focus was on her hand rubbing behind her left ear. My neck itches, and I instinctively rub the scar on the back of my neck where my hairline is as I nod. Something in the pit of my stomach tells me something is amiss. I cannot ignore it.

“Sounds great,” I tell them, plastering a fake smile on my face. Abbie’s smile waivers slightly.

“Well, I will let you go, call me tomorrow night,” I tell her, and Kade pops back into view.

“I will make sure she does,” he says, kissing her cheek in a show of affection. Abbie blows me some kisses.

“I love you,” she says.

“More than my life,” I reply.

“Yep, you know that” she says, smiling, and my heart hammers in my chest. I press my lips in a line as she rubs the spot behind her ear. She didn’t say it back. She always says it back!

“I love you; I will speak with you tomorrow,” I tell her. She nods, and we both hang up.

“She seems good. Hopefully, Gannon will get off my back now,” Kyson says.

“She didn’t say it back,” I tell him, staring at the blacked-out screen.

“Pardon?” Kyson asks.

“She always says it back!” I tell him. Kyson’s brows furrow.

“She looked fine, she said so herself.”

“They are making her say that, Kyson. She didn’t say it back!” I tell him, becoming angry.

“I know you miss her, but...”

“She didn’t say it back. She always says it back. We are leaving now; we are bringing her home,” I tell him.

Kyson growls and shakes his head. “Kade will bring her up the following weekend. She seems fine, looked great, and seems to be getting along with Cassandra,” Kyson says.

Is he thick? Did he not hear what I said? Anger courses through me, the raging lust burning out. I know Abbie, and I try to explain about her touching the scar behind her ear. But Kyson looks back at me like I have three heads. I know Abbie better than I know myself.

Kyson reaches out for me, but I pull away.

“We need to go get Abbie, now!”

“I can’t do that, Azalea. She wants to stay; she told me herself when I asked.”

“I don’t care what she told you. I am telling you, it was an act! That was not Abbie, not my Abbie!” I yell at him.

Kyson reaches for my hand, and I jerk it away from him. “Don’t fucking touch me. We need to get Abbie,” I snap, and he growls at me.

“You are being ridiculous. She is fine,” he retorts, stepping closer, but I take a step back.

“Azalea!”

“We need to go get Abbie!” I snarl.