

## Chapter 33

### AZALEA

Dustin doesn't slow the car down once but glances at me nervously when we come to a particular spot on the winding roads. We know the castle is already aware of us leaving because Trey has mind linked Dustin. I'm nervous, knowing the king will be furious. Plus, I'm scared for Dustin. "What?" I ask him, seeing him suddenly becoming nervous.

"We are about to drive through no-man's-land. I need you to get in the back. We aren't sure if the hunters know about you yet, but it won't surprise me because they have eyes and ears everywhere. Nowhere is safe," he tells me. My heart beats erratically at his words, and I swallow. We are deep into the forest and heading toward a range that leads between the mountains.

"Climb in the back and put your belt on. Stay low; the hunters have wild-game cameras in the trees, and I don't want you spotted. We cannot stop along this stretch, especially without the Royal Guard with us," Dustin tells me, and I glance at the backseat over my shoulder. I unplug my seatbelt before climbing between the seats and into the back. Peering around the back on the floor, I notice some tools, recognizing

one to be a wheel brace. Also, some duct tape and rope. I bite my lip, not wanting to know why they are in the car. The wheel brace, sure, but why the duct tape and rope?

“Seatbelt, Azalea,” Dustin says firmly before shrugging his jacket off, only leaving one hand on the wheel at a time. I quickly plug it in and see him glance in the rear vision mirror. He tosses me the jacket.

“Now, get down! Pull that jacket over you. The windows aren’t tinted in this car,” he says, and I sink in my seat just as he floors it, accelerating even more. I am shocked at how much speed this car has; I honestly think we are moving too fast. Everything zips by in a blur. We are passing cars like they are standing still. I remain quiet, letting him focus on driving along the steep, winding road leading into the mountains.

When we come to the top, it is a harrowing drive back down the other side, and he never slows, if anything, he speeds up more. I start to feel queasy from the motion. The car slides around the corners, causing me to hit the door. His eyes flickering to me in the rear vision mirror occasionally makes my heart jolt knowing he has taken his eyes off the road, even if only briefly.

After another half an hour of driving, I hear him let out a relieved sigh, so I know we must be coming into Alpha Kade’s territory or at least off no-man’s-land.

“How far out are we?” I ask him, and he looks back at me.

“About thirty minutes from the packhouse,” Dustin says. We drive a little further, and I see a sign saying we are coming to a town when my phone starts ringing. Dustin glances at it, where it sits in the center console. We are coming to another steep incline, and I wonder why anyone would live far out into the mountains, hoping this one wouldn’t be as winding as the last one. Leaning over, I grab it and answer it. What I wasn’t expecting was to hear Abbie’s voice.

“Pick up, pick up,” I hear her say, not realizing the call has already connected.

“Abbie?” I ask, and Dustin glances at me in the mirror, his brows furrow, and I know he must be listening in on the call.

“Pull the phone away. Now on the screen, there should be a microphone picture. Press it so I can hear what she is saying,” Dustin says. I quickly do as I am told before staring at the phone, wishing I could see her. “Are you there?” I hear her ask.

“Yes, can you hear me?” I ask her, the phone volume turning a little static and crackling.

A sob escapes Abbie. “Ivy! Oh please, thank god,” she gasps.

“I’m right here,” I tell her, and she cries into the phone, trying to contain herself.

“Did she answer?” I hear a man’s voice says in the background.

“She answered, thank you so much,” I hear her gush, her voice lowers slightly so I know she has turned her face away from the phone.

“Are you there still?”

“Yes, I am. I am...” The phone crackles before the phone drops out of reception. It immediately starts ringing again, and I answer it, putting it on the loudspeaker once more.

“Abbie?”

“Listen, I need you to come to get me. I was wrong about Kade, Ivy. Send Gannon. Please! I want to come home; I am...” she falls silent. “I don’t know where I am. I can’t read the sign; I am... where am I?” I hear her ask the person with her.

“Metro service station, it is in Langley,” I hear a man’s voice tell her in the background.

“Metro Service station in Langley. Abbie is there!” I tell Dustin, and he nods, having already heard.

“Are you okay, Abbie? We are nearly there,” I say to Abbie, and she sighs.

“You have to be quick; I know he already knows I ran. Wait, you are nearly here?” she asks.

“You never said it back,” I tell her, and she breaks down, sobbing into the phone.

“I thought you didn’t figure it out,” Abbie chokes out, and the phone goes grainy again.

“You always say it back,” I tell her.

“What sort of car did you say your boyfriend drives?” I hear the man ask in the background before listening to Abbie gasp. “A black one,” she says when I hear a bell chime in the background.

“Get down behind the counter,” he says, and the phone goes deadily silent.

“He found me! Hurry!” I hear her whisper into the phone. I hear the service station attendant speak close to her and realize she must be behind the counter with him.

“Can I help you, sir?” I hear him ask before hearing Kade’s voice.

“I’m looking for a girl. Abbie, come out. This human won’t save you from me,” Kade’s voice growls.

“Sir, I have not seen a girl,” the man says.

“I can smell her. Now come out, Abbie, before I kill this man!” I hear Kade growl out. I swallow, listening intently before hearing Abbie scream along with loud banging and grunts. A furious growl tears out of Kade, and my heart sinks to my stomach. I place the phone to my ear, and the phone goes dead. “Abbie?” All I got is the dial tone.

Dustin floors it, driving faster toward the town when suddenly, he screams at the cars swerving off the road. It’s like time is slowing down. My eyes widen when Dustin tenses and clutches his head. My gasp sounds so loud as we hit the gravel and the side rail.

The car becomes airborne as it bounces off the guardrail and flies toward the forest. Dustin turns his head to look at me. I see a horrified look on his face as the car careens over the side rail, turning upside down in the air. Dustin’s eyes are glazed over, and I can see someone has mindlinked him, which caused the accident.

The sound of metal on metal reverberates as the car flips and smashes into trees, rolling down the hill. My stomach lurches into my throat, and I am tossed around like a rag doll in the back seat, the windows smashing out, and the noise is so loud it makes my ears ring. The

crunching of metal and breaking windows rings out into the night as the car bounces off the tree.

My head smashes against the roof lining, and the car lands upright beside an enormous tree. Dazed, I groan, clutching my head as I peer around to see Dustin slumped forward in his seat, knocked out. Blood is dripping from his head. Frantically, I tug on my seatbelt, trying to unclip it. I attempt to open my door, but it is crushed from the roof, and the other door is pinned against the tree that has stopped rolling further down the hill. Finally getting free of my seatbelt, pain ricochets through me with each movement.

Reaching forward, I grip the back of the front seat headrest, pulling myself forward, my fingers slipping off the leather fabric made slippery with my blood. Blood trickles down the side of my face, some getting in my mouth and filling my left eye. I blink, wiping my face with the back of my hand and shuffling forward in my seat.

Climbing over the backseat into the passenger's, I see the footwell is no longer there as the dash is pushed right into the chair. My knee brushes something that sends shooting pain through my abdomen. Falling in the passenger seat, I choke when I see a massive piece of metal embedded in my hip and stomach.

A gasp leaves me when I try to pull it out before choking on a sob and deciding to leave it. Sickened, I touch my back to find it has gone through. I have an overwhelming urge to pull it out, but I know it's probably best to leave it. Grabbing Dustin's head, I tilt it back, and he groans; his shoulders drop, his head falling forward when I let him go

before it snaps upright. Dustin glances around at me frantically, twisting in his seat. He clutches my arms before peering down at the metal that is stabbing through me.

“I’m fine,” I tell him, though I can feel my pants and shirt soaked with blood.

Dustin looks around. “The king ordered me to stop,” he says, clutching his head. He tries to open his door, but it’s stuck against the tree. I gasp in pain, and Dustin tries to pull his legs out from under the steering wheel, which is pressed to his stomach. The whole front end of the car pushed into the front seats.

“Hang on, I will get you out,” he says while groaning when he tries to unpin himself. My head pounds and my eyes pulse to their own beat. My vision blurs as I glance around at the dark forest, only to spot the glimmer of lights among the trees at the bottom of the incline.

Those are town lights, and I gasp. “Abbie!”

“Azalea, no,” Dustin hisses, attempting to free himself.

“That’s where she is,” I tell him, and he tries to grab my arm as I turn in my seat.

“Wait, the king and Gannon are on their way,” he tells me, grimacing.



I shake my head, staring at him, but he looks fine despite being a little banged up and trapped. Abbie is right down there; I can just make out the service station's enormous neon sign blinking like a beacon straight to her.

"No, Azalea. They are twenty minutes behind us. Wait."

"Huh, we left hours ago," I tell him. There is no way they could have caught up to us by now.

"Lycans can outrun even the fastest cars, Azalea. The king is running through the forest to get here, and Gannon is even closer. Just wait. You can't even shift from the drugs in your system to stop your heat," Dustin growls at me, punching the steering wheel in frustration because he can't get out.

"But Abbie, she is right there," I tell him. He shakes his head. I sigh before nodding. "Fine, at least let me climb out and see if I can open the door for you so you can slide out." He sighs, glancing at his trapped legs and then nods.

"Be careful. That rod is all the way through," he says, peering at my stomach. I touch it and hiss, wondering where it came from before realizing it is a wheel brace on the back floor. I gulp but carefully climb through my broken window and out of the car. Blood drenches me from the movement, and I hit the ground hard, coughing and sputtering.

"Azalea!" Dustin shrieks.

“I’m fine,” I choke, getting to my feet and trudging around the wrecked car. That’s when I hear a blood-curdling scream.

“Ivy!” her voice rings out clearly through the forest, bouncing off the trees. My blood goes ice-cold, and I glance through the broken windshield at Dustin. He shakes his head. His eyes go wide when I hear her scream again. My heart rate spikes, and I feel adrenaline pulse through me.

“Don’t you do it,” Dustin screams as I take off, running to wherever I hear her voice screaming out into the night.