

Chapter 34

AZALEA

Once I start running down the hill, I find I am unable to stop. The incline propels me down, and even as I try to gain traction, I slide, underestimating how steep the mountain is, and unable to stop my feet. I try to grab a tree trunk, only for my grip to slip straight off, causing the air to leave my lungs as the motion of the attempt hurtles me to the ground at an angle. The wheel brace pushes through me further, stealing my breath as pain courses through me.

A scream tears from my lips at the agony, and I roll down the hill, smashing into trees and becoming airborne. I tumble down before hitting the bottom and seeing black as my head bounces off the hard ground.

It is only moments when my surroundings return. I am too dazed and in too much pain at first to realize what's going on. The wheel brace has been ripped out somewhere along the way. My vision blurs and doubles as I get to my hands and knees, trying to catch my breath. The trees look more like a wall encasing me as I stagger to my feet. I stumble around blindly for what feels like forever until the vertigo and

blurriness abate. The forest is deadly silent. Not even the sound of crickets can be heard. Stumbling out of the tree line, I find myself in a grassy area beside a road.

My eyes try desperately to scan my surroundings, my vision attempting to correct itself. But everything looks extremely fuzzy except the neon sign, which blinks frantically. All I can hear is the static noise emanating from it. The service station is about 300 yards from me and across the road. I am about to make my way over to it when Abbie's scream rings out loudly and sends my head turning to my left to see Kade ripping Abbie backward from the woods. Abbie is kicking and screaming, thrashing around wildly as she struggles against him. Her pleas fall on deaf ears, however. Kade ignores her as he rips her out of the tree line near to me.

A gasp escapes me as I pivot and head toward her, only to trip in a small dip in the grass, landing face down in the dewy grass.

My heart races as I struggle to get to my feet. My breathing is harsh as I stagger determinedly toward Abbie and Kade. I keep falling, unable to keep my legs under me, and hitting the damp ground. The air leaves my lungs in a long wheeze on the fourth fall. I feel like I am trying to walk on the moon or like I'm drunk. The ground is moving under me, and I clutch my stomach, trying to stem the bleeding. My head pounds against my skull as I make my way over to them.

"I reject you; I reject you!!" Abbie screams. I groan, the sound barely audible to my own ears over her screaming. Kade tosses her to the

ground, and she crawls away from him as I struggle to get back to my feet.

“Doesn’t work like that, love. That is not how you reject someone,” he growls at her, stalking toward her. On my hands and knees, I see a rock and grab it before getting to my feet, and I hear a scream. It takes me a few moments to realize it is my own war cry when I rush at him, and he suddenly spins around, deflecting my raised hand about to hit him with the rock.

Kade and I crash to the ground. The rock flies from my grip as he lands on top of me and rolls away. Kade growls, trying to pin me.

“What are you doing here?” he snaps, holding me down on my back. I thought it odd. He could easily kill me, yet he only tries to pin me. Kade abruptly freezes before he growls and looks over his shoulder. His eyes dart to the tree line in a panic. Suddenly, I hear a thud, and Kade tenses above me.

I spot Abbie behind me, the rock in her hand, and Kade’s blood drips on me, where she has hit him with it. Kade turns to attack her, but I grab his ankle, tripping him, and Abbie smashes him in the head with the rock again, and he goes limp on the ground, face down and unmoving.

Sitting up, I stare at her, and she rushes over to me. Tears streak her face, blood coats her skin, and she has twigs in her hair.

The rock drops from her hand as she steps over Kade and moves toward me to help me sit up. My hand goes immediately to my stomach, which is bleeding a steady stream and saturating my torn and filthy pants.

“Ivy!” Abbie gushes, clutching my arms as she hauls me upright. A sigh escapes me, and she grabs my face in her hands, sobbing uncontrollably. Only the moment she does. I see Kade get back to his feet, and my eyes go wide as he stumbles, looking around.

“Abbie!” I gasp, and she looks briefly behind her before ripping me to my feet with a strength I wasn’t sure she possessed, given the state she was in.

“Can you shift?” I ask her, but she shakes her head.

“You?” I look down at my bleeding wound and also shake mine. Abbie whimpers, and Kade seems confused. Suddenly, howls in the distance ring out loudly, sending my blood cold. An icy shiver slivers up my spine.

“The pack! He called his pack!” Abbie panics.

“We need to get to Dustin; I can’t shift,” I choke out, nodding toward the tree line. She looks up at the steep incline. Suddenly, a dark, blurry figure pops out of the corner of my eye, tackling her to the ground. I scream when I see Kade sink his teeth into her neck, re-marking her and reinforcing their bond. Wolves burst from the trees and across the road, coming from behind the service station and racing toward us.

“You can’t touch the girl!” Kade screams at them while pointing at me, then turns his attention back to Abbie. He grips her shoulders, slamming her onto the ground. Adrenaline courses through me. Suddenly, I am no longer on the ground, and I find myself standing.

“Submit!” Kade screams at her. Abbie’s face goes slack under his command just as my body crashes into his.

Abbie shakes her head, trying to fight it off, and I hit the ground beside her. Kade rolls over the top of me.

My eyes go wide when I see wolves rushing straight at us, snapping their teeth, and snarling at us. I close my eyes, waiting for my death, when Abbie grips my fingers, and my head rolls to the side to find her looking at me.

“More than my life,” she whispers, tears filling her eyes and her lips quivering.

“More than my life,” I murmur, closing my eyes as I watch her close hers. Together, we wait for death, like we have before. Their paws on the earth grow closer when I hear a feral snarl rip through the air, bouncing off the trees, and I hear the wolves’ claws digging into the soft ground as they skid around us.

My eyes fly open to find Dustin stepping over the top of us in his Lycan form. Dustin kicks Kade in the face as he tries to stand. Blood drenches

him where he has pulled himself free from the car, but he doesn't appear to be bleeding anymore. Dustin growls, but it comes like more of a roar. The wolves jump back, and Kade gets to his feet and staggers backward, trying to get away from him.

"Kill him," I murmur to Dustin. My eyes flicker as I fight to remain conscious.

"If I do, it may kill Abbie," he growls, and I look at Abbie, tears glistening in her eyes.

"Reject her now!" Dustin tells him through gritted teeth. However, there is no command behind it. Rolling on my side, I grab Dustin's leg, and his hand reaches down, gripping my arm to pull me upright.

"Order him," I choke out as blood fills my mouth from having bitten my tongue.

"I can't," Dustin grinds out, and I look at him, not understanding.

"You're Lycan," I whisper to him.

"I'm under oath being a Royal Guard. I can't break a mate bond. It is law and pact sworn to be upheld; I am bound by that oath, Azalea!"

Kade laughs, getting to his feet. I glance at Abbie as she sits up.

“Come here, Abbie,” Kade orders, and I see her eyes glaze over. She obeys, taking a step toward him. My heart skips a beat as she dazedly starts walking over to her mate. Dustin grabs her arm, and Kade clicks his tongue.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” Kade says, his pack of wolves circling around us. We are severely outnumbered. Dustin glances around nervously. Lycans are lethal, but against fifty-plus wolves, I’m not sure how we would fare when Dustin is the only one who is shifted.

“You are aware of the repercussions, Dustin. Don’t be foolish,” Kade snarls. I peer up at Dustin, hanging onto Abbie’s arm, preventing her from going to Kade, and his other hand holding me against him.

I move behind Dustin and rip Abbie backward and away from Kade. Gripping her arms, I shake her, but her fresh mark seems to have done something to her willpower; I can see she has multiple mate marks on her neck from him.

“Abbie, reject him,” I murmur, shaking her.

Kade laughs and steps forward, which makes Dustin growl threateningly.

“You can’t touch me. I am just collecting my mate. I haven’t injured your queen; I only tried to hold her. Though by law I could, considering she tried to take my mate from me by force,” Kade says cockily. “You

do anything, and I have a lot of witnesses,” Kade says, motioning around to his pack. Dustin moves in front of us, but even I know if he attacks Kade, the rest of those wolves will rip us apart.

“Abbie, reject him,” I beg.

Kade laughs louder and claps his hands. “She really doesn’t know, and she is expected to be our queen? Pathetic! Foolish, you would expect the king to have more sense to pick a mate more suited to the position and keep his whore on the side. She can’t run a pack, noble blood or not; she isn’t fit for the title,” he chuckles.

“Hold your tongue, mutt. You do not know what you speak of,” Dustin snaps at him.

“No, your oblivious queen isn’t aware of the law. Should I educate her simple mind?”

I glance at him over my shoulder. “For Abbie to reject me, I have to accept it. Which I won’t. She will leave with me.”

“No, she rejects you. She can come home,” I tell him. Kyson promised she could come home; she just had to ask.

“Wrong. A minor flaw in the king’s law. Both parties must accept, and if one doesn’t, it is decided by the council. Only then is it forced, but until then, she is mine, and I will like to collect her now!” Kade says,

moving toward us. I look at Dustin, whose entire body tenses, and I glance back at Abbie. I shake her, anger coursing through me.

“Reject him!” I snap at her, trying to get her attention. “Abbie, reject him!” I yell in her face. Something I said clicks, and she suddenly straightens. She blinks, shaking her head.

“I don’t know how. It didn’t work,” she murmurs, coming out of whatever stupor she was in.

“He is an Alpha you have to reject as your mate and as your Alpha. State your full name and reject him using his title,” Dustin murmurs, not taking his eyes off Kade.

“But he is right, Azalea,” Dustin glances at me. “I can’t force him to accept it,” Dustin whispers.

“Reject him,” I tell her, shaking her. Kade just laughs evilly. Stepping toward her, his hand goes to grab her.

“Come, Abbie,” Kade says, clicking his fingers at her. That same glazed look washes over her face at his command. I swallow, and she pushes past me when anger courses through me. I grab both her arms, jerking her back to me.

“Reject him!” I growl, and much to my astonishment, she does. My aura slips out, and I don’t know how I managed to do it, but she looks at Kade and speaks clearly.

“I, Abbie Marie Barker, reject you, Alpha Kade, as my mate and Alpha,” she says. Kade growls, clutching his chest, while Abbie shakes her head and blinks rapidly.

“I, Alpha Kade, reject your rejection,” he snarls, and she whimpers. My fury becomes emblazoned by the fire burning in me at his words, and I turn on him.

“Accept it!” I roar, and it is like a burst erupting out of me. My words didn’t feel like words but something else entirely. All the surrounding wolves yelp and cry out. I feel the tingling sensation wash over my body and out of me as the command takes hold of him and makes him tense.

“I, Alpha Kade, accept your rejection as my Luna and Mate,” Kade blurts out, unable to fight the command. Abbie screams, clutching her chest and falling to her knees, and Kade staggers backward, clutching his chest, looking dazed.