

## Chapter 46

### AZALEA

Walking out of my room, Liam greets me by looping his arm through mine in a gesture that feels both familiar and comforting. “And what adventure do we embark on today, My Queen?” he asks with a playful glint in his eyes. I scan the area, searching for Dustin.

“Dustin went to fetch your breakfast,” Liam informs me as we start descending the steps.

“I’m not hungry. I simply wish to see Abbie,” I reply with a slight furrow of my brow, heading toward Gannon’s room. Abbie has remained secluded in the room since our return, prompting Gannon’s desire to take her somewhere. Before she departs, I need to make sure she’s healing alright.

Kyson told me she is leaving through the mindlink. It always freaks me out when he uses it. I’m not used to having someone in my head, let alone being a part of something. Abbie is rogue again, and I hate that, but she refuses to let Gannon mark her. Every time I ask Kyson to make

her part of the pack, he says she refuses and he can't unless he changes her.

I understand why. It's not just about her feeling unworthy of deserving good things. If Gannon fails to help her, she won't remain Lycan, and I can't fathom a world without Abbie by my side. Shortly after the King's departure, Gannon visited to inform me that he plans on whisking her away, and they'd depart after lunch.

Strolling through the winding corridors that lead to the back of the castle, I rap my knuckles against the door, hoping for a response. But silence greets me instead. I glance up at Liam, and with a determined grip on the door handle, he pushes it open cautiously, peeking inside.

"I'll wait here. Gannon isn't around," Liam informs me, his gaze averted as if avoiding something uncomfortable. I nod in acknowledgment before making my way into the dimly lit darkroom. The heavy curtains are drawn shut, blocking out any trace of light and making it challenging for my eyes to adjust. In my attempt to navigate the room, I accidentally stub my toe on a coffee table, a surge of annoyance coursing through me. Cursing under my breath, I press forward toward the bathroom door.

"Abbie? It's me," I call out softly, hoping for a response. None comes. However, it sounds as if she is crying behind that door, and suddenly, I understand why Liam hesitated to enter. Taking in my surroundings, I push the door open wider and close it behind me. As I turn toward the darkened bathroom, I notice the mirrors have been concealed by large sheets of black paper, rendering the space even darker than the main

room. The air is thick with the saltiness of her tears mingling with billowing steam.

An instant wave of perspiration breaks out across my skin; it feels like a stifling sauna in here. Strained murmurs emanate from within the enormous glass shower stall, its surface fogged up by steam.

“Abbie?” I whisper, opening the shower screen. And there she is, huddled at the bottom of the shower, scrubbing herself with a ferocity that seems it will be painful while she presses into the corner.

Her skin is flushed and raw from the scalding water. It is evident she isn’t okay. Everyone knows it but seeing her like this shatters my heart. Abruptly, she halts her movements as if only just realizing my presence. Slowly, she lifts her head and stares blankly ahead.

Clutched tightly in her hand is a scourer, the kind one would use to clean heavily stained pots, not delicate skin.

“I can still feel his hands, Az. Still taste his vileness in my mouth,” she whispers, her vacant gaze fixed on some distant point. A tear slips down her cheek, mingling with the cascading water before disappearing down the drain. Her quivering lip reveals the pain etched deep within her. Without hesitation, I step into the scalding hot shower, my clothes immediately becoming soaked.

I move toward her, near the far wall, and sit beside her. Some parts of her skin are bleeding, evidence of how harshly she has scrubbed

herself. The scars that litter her body are raw and angry, although thankfully, they have healed and are now nothing more than raised reminders.

“Sometimes, it’s alright to remember the darkness, Abbie. Just don’t linger there for too long. Don’t let it trap you or give him control that he no longer has over you,” I tell her gently, my grip tightening around her hand that holds the scourer.

“I don’t want control. I want to forget, to hate him without loving him. How can you still love someone even after they do something like that? I should have listened to Gannon. I should have stayed,” Abbie whispers.

“That wasn’t love, Abbie. It was the mate bond, a twisted version of what you thought love should be,” I explained.

“I was naive, foolish,” she scolds herself bitterly.

“No, you wanted something more than what we have been given, and that’s not your fault,” I tell her. I sit with her, letting the boiling water scald my legs.

Thankfully, she only has her legs under the water, the rest of her pressed against the wall.

“I can’t live like this, Az. I don’t want to anymore. I don’t want to be the broken doll.”

This isn’t the Abbie I know. This is who remained after everything has been taken from her. She seems as helpless now as she did when we first entered that orphanage. Back then, we were just children, unaware of the true horrors of the world, accepting whatever fate was dealt to us because we didn’t know any better.

Now that we are older, our eyes have opened to the harsh realities, the monsters that lurk in the shadows, and the lies that shaped our childhood. What we once considered normal has become distorted; what we thought was normal no longer is, and we are still uncertain of this new normal.

We have grown accustomed to pain because pain is familiar, comfortable in our own misery because it has become routine. Brokenness has become our norm. But how do you fix something that has become so deeply ingrained?

How do you break free from a cycle where pain is perceived as normal? Pain is not normal yet, all we know, or I did know until I met Kyson. Abbie hasn’t met her new normal; she is still suffering in the version we grew up with. Kade has compounded that feeling exponentially. And I can see she is tired - tired of the old normal. Though she once wore her resilience like armor, now it lay exposed, revealing her desire to shed its weight.

“You’re not broken,” I whisper despite the fact she looks it.

“I am. I don’t even know who I am anymore,” she murmurs, her gaze distant and emotionless.

“You’re my best friend, my sister. You are more than my life,” I tell her, squeezing her hand.

“No, we are you! We are rogue. We are whatever they let us be and nothing more,” she says.

“Only if you allow yourself to be. You are not defined by what he did to you, Abbie. You are not a reflection of the butcher’s actions, and we are not limited by the beliefs Mrs. Daley instilled in us,” I counter.

“You aren’t. You are a princess and soon-to-be queen. You are Azalea Ivy Landeena. I am rogue, I am nothing, and now everyone knows what they did, everyone knows the dirty things I wish I could forget; I am sick of them looking at me with pity, sick of them looking at me with disgust, sick of being what he made me!”

Abbie buries her face in her hands, tears streaming down her cheeks. Her shoulders shake with each anguished breath, and I can’t even begin to fathom the depth of her pain. But one thing is certain—she will make it through this. She has to because a world without her presence is no world worth being in.

“Then be Abbie,” I tell her, putting my head on her shoulder.

“But I don’t know who she is,” Abbie murmurs, her voice emotionless.

“What they did to you is not you, but a reflection of them. That is who they were. Were Abbie. They are dead, and you are still breathing. They don’t get another chance, but you do, so take it; don’t let them chain you down in the memory of what they did. They don’t deserve it. Live because you can and want to,” I tell her, and she shakes her head and pulls her knees to her chest.

Abbie puts her head in her hands and cries. Her shoulders shake, and I can’t begin to imagine what she is going through, but she will get through this. She has to.

“You sound like Gannon, but even he looks at me the same as everyone else, even you do; I know you can’t help it, but—” she chokes out, her entire body shaking.

“I don’t look at you with pity, Abbie. I see beyond the pain and the scars. I see the strength and resilience that define who you truly are. You are so much more than what they have done to you. You are the girl for whom I would risk my life, the one who has stood by my side when all hope seemed lost. And now, right here in this moment, I need you to make a choice. Are you going to jump? Because if you do, I will jump with you.”

Abbie's voice trembles as she responds, her words carrying the weight of her self-doubt. "But I am nothing compared to you. I am just a werewolf while you are a queen."

Her belief in her own insignificance pains me deeply. "You are everything to me, Abbie. My title means nothing if I don't have you by my side, and you will be my Beta, so don't tell me you are nothing because the only reason I am still here for any of this is because of you."

Abbie chuckles and shakes her head but lifts it, placing it against the wall. "I am a werewolf. You are Lycan, I can't be your Beta, and I wouldn't know the first thing about being a Beta."

"Do you think I know how to be a queen?" I laugh softly, sitting up higher to meet her gaze.

"I can't even read, but we have people here who will help us. I have Kyson. You have Gannon and me."

"But what if Gannon leaves me when he realizes I can't give him what he wants?" Abbie's voice trembles with fear.

"He wants to change you and mark you, Abbie. He isn't going anywhere. And even if he does, I will always be here for you," I tell her.

"You would change me?" she asks.



“Wouldn’t think twice about it, but we may have to ask how, though, because I am not that good at being Lycan yet,” I chuckle.

A chuckle escapes Abbie’s lips, mirroring my own. But her smile fades all too quickly, replaced by a somber expression. “Who would have thought that freedom could be worse than the chains that once bound us?”

“Freedom isn’t something that is given, Abbie. It’s a mindset. Only we can free ourselves.”

“Do you feel free?” she asks, and I sigh.

“I don’t know, but I know we aren’t the orphan rogues anymore. I don’t know who I am either, but I am determined to find out, and I prefer we find out together,” I tell her, and she swallows.

“More than my life,” she whispers.

“More than my life,” I reply, the weight of those words sinking deep into my soul.

“More than my life,” Gannon’s deep voice interrupts our conversation, catching us off guard. Neither of us heard him enter the room. As he leans against the sink basin, his presence commands attention.

“Gannon?” Abbie sighs, shaking her head beside me.

“How long have you been there?” I ask, surprised by his sudden appearance.

“Long enough,” he answers curtly. “Now hop out. We are leaving.”

Abbie remains unmoved, her body curled up against the wall as if trying to hide from him. Gannon’s eyes briefly meet mine before he rubs his tired face, a reflection of the blacked-out mirror behind him. I glance back at Abbie, taking in the scars that mark her skin.

“I told you I am not going,” Abbie says, staring vacantly ahead.

“You are. You can’t stay in here, love. So please,” Gannon begs, crouching down in front of us when he opens the door. I look to Abbie, who makes herself smaller as if she is trying to hide her body away from him.

But I refuse to let her feel ashamed of her body. Her scars may not be easily hidden like mine, but they are a testament to her strength and survival. She must know that.

“Can you please get out?” Abbie whispers, her voice barely audible.

We have the same markings. No doubt, hers are causing her more pain because while the cuts will heal, the marks on her heart... I'm not so sure.

Nonetheless, I can tell she is ashamed of her body, and what has become of it, and if that is what is preventing her from leaving the room, she needs to know she has nothing to be ashamed of. Her scars can't be hidden by clothes like mine can be, but that doesn't mean she should feel ashamed of them.

"Can you get out, please?" she whispers, her knees close to her chest.

"I have already seen you naked, Abbie," Gannon responds matter-of-factly. Her face flushes crimson, her lips quivering.

"I can't go out there," she confesses, her voice filled with anguish. I take note of the scars that trail down her neck and shoulders, as well as the cuts on her face that have left white lines once healed. To me, she is still beautiful. I remember the shame I felt when the king asked me to undress in front of him and how Abbie pleaded on my behalf. Gannon sighs, frustration etched across his features, but he never directs it at Abbie.

"It's just skin, Abbie," I whisper gently. But for her, those scars hold memories and pain I cannot fully comprehend.

"He mutilated me. It's one thing for everyone here to know, but it's another for the whole world to see," she croaks.

Trying to feel for the mind link, I push on it, hoping I can open it myself, but when I struggle, Kyson opens it for me. I really can't get used to him being in my head. The bond is one thing, but the mind is something else. Kyson makes it look easy, but it's not.

'Why do you feel embarrassed?' Kyson's voice resonates through the mind link.

'Abbie hates her body,' I relay to him.

'And that embarrasses you?' he questions, his words causing my face to flush with shame. 'Hmm, I don't like this feeling. Where are you?'

'In the shower with Abbie,' I respond.

'I see,' he acknowledges.

'Not like that. I have clothes on, but....'

'But what?'

'I want to take them off,' I admit, my cheeks burning even hotter. Being naked in front of Abbie doesn't faze me. We have seen each other unclothed countless times before.

‘You’re both girls, and I don’t see a problem with that.’

My face heats even more. I am not afraid to be naked in front of Abbie.

‘Spit it out, Azalea. Your hesitation is making me uneasy. What is it?’  
Kyson demands, an edge to his voice.

‘Imagine if I were to walk outside in the castle completely naked,’ I blurt out, surprising myself with the audacity of my statement.

‘Definitely not,’ Kyson growls. His words anger me and fuel my next answer

‘I wasn’t asking permission,’ I tell him, though I was kind of hoping he would give it because I didn’t exactly want this to cause an argument.

‘Then why are you telling me?’ he snaps back.

‘So you don’t find out from the staff,’ I explain.

‘Azalea!’ he snaps.

‘Will be naked, walking the corridors naked,’ I answer.

‘Like hell you are!’

I cut him off, only for the mind link to open up again, and he forced his way back into my head.

‘Somebody shut off the damn cameras,’ Kyson snarls through the mind link, broadcasting his message to all the castle staff. Their voices flood my mind, overwhelming me with their presence.

‘Do we have cameras?’ I ask, bewildered by this revelation.

‘Yes, they were installed two days ago. And you are absolutely not doing this,’ Kyson declares adamantly.

‘But I am,’ I insist, my determination unwavering.

‘Why are we shutting off the cameras?’ Gannon’s voice interjects suddenly through the mind link. The multitude of voices in my head begins to give me a headache, and I struggle to regain control. I struggle, trying to shut them off, only for Kyson to force his way back into my head.

‘Do not let Azalea leave the bathroom,’ Kyson growls at him.

‘Pardon, My King,’ Gannon answers. Abbie touches my arm as she stands, making me jump and pulling me back to focus on the room.

She grabs a towel and wraps it around herself, and I stand, stepping out of the shower. My face is already heating. I start shredding my clothes, dropping them in a wet heap as Abbie sticks her head out the door. Kyson is yelling at me through the mind link and the guards, and I try my best to ignore him.

“I will get you some spare clothes,” Abbie says.

“Don’t bother,” I tell her, and she glances at me but quickly rushes into the room. Kyson is still talking through the mind link and arguing with the guards about leaving Gannon’s quarters. While Liam asks a barrage of never-ending and inappropriate questions, I find it hard to keep tabs on how many people’s voices are suddenly flitting through my head.

I grab a towel and dry myself, and Abbie runs back into the room with a cami and shorts, trying to pass them to me while she starts pulling on a turtle neck and long pants.

“Here,” she whispers, but I shake my head. “Az?”

I move to step past her when she stops in front of me.

“Gannon is out there,” she says, gripping my arm when he suddenly opens the door, standing completely naked. I have no idea where to look, so I stare up at the roof, and so does he. Awkward.

‘Hang on, we’re doing this in style,’ Liam says through the mind link and I look at Gannon, who sends me a wink.

‘I swear, Azalea, when I get home,’ Kyson starts.

‘Well, that sounds like a challenge, My King,’ I tell him.

‘Put some clothes on, and Liam, stay away from my mate,’ he snaps.

‘What? No, I am streaking with her, got my best apron for this, and if Gannon is strutting his stuff, so is me; sometimes you gotta air out the old skinsuit,’ Liam says.

‘I said clear the halls,’ the king commands.

‘Everyone remains at their posts!’ I command back, a little shocked at how easily I did.

The king growls. ‘Azalea!’

‘My King?’ Clarice says through the mind link.

I can hear Abbie asking what is going on, but I grab her hand almost blindly as everyone’s faces flit through my head along with their voices.



‘I can’t do this with you in my damn head,’ I tell Kyson.

‘Good because you aren’t doing it,’ he growls.

‘What is going on?’ Clarice asks.

‘Azalea is about to streak through the damn halls,’ Kyson tells her.

I focus on the mind link, trying to get him out of my head. When I manage it, I am still standing in the bathroom, though I can see Gannon now. I make sure to keep my eyes above the waist. I do not want to see more than I need to. However, I am shocked to find his flesh torn apart more than ours.

“Are we doing this?” he asks, staring at me.

“Doing what?” Abbie squeaks, looking between us.

“Oh good, I am not late,” Liam says, busting into the bathroom with only a floral apron on.

“Oh la la, My Queen, lovely birthday suit,” he says, not even being subtle as he peeks at me. I swallow under his leering gaze.

‘Eyes off my mate Liam.’

‘Hitting above your belt there, My King,’ Liam snorts, earning a growl through the mind link Kyson keeps forcing open. Liam reaches past Gannon, grabs my wrist, jerks me to him, and loops his arm through mine while Abbie stands stunned. She grabs my arm as Liam tugs me toward the door.

“What are you doing?”

“We are showing you. You aren’t the only one a little broken,” Gannon says, offering his arm to her.

“Man, the king doesn’t shut up. Bit bossy, if you ask me. How do you put up with him?” Liam says. As Kyson keeps trying to order his men out, I realize something, his commands on Liam and Gannon are not working. That realization hits me, and at the same time, it hits Kyson, and I know something is amiss.

‘Azalea?’ he asks.

‘I love you, but I am doing this for Abbie,’ I tell him, and he growls.

‘Them cameras better be fucking off!’ he calls through the open mindlink.

‘Already off,’ I hear Dustin call back.

“Well, now this is definitely an adventure, so I guess we are off,” Liam says, opening the door and bowing. Abbie giggles behind me, and I glance over my shoulder to see Gannon put his hands over her eyes when Liam shakes his ass at her. I try not to laugh and close my eyes, willing myself to step out the doors and not run back to the bathroom.

‘You are in so much trouble when I get home,’ Kyson snaps at me.

Anger courses through me, and Abbie gasps. I open my eyes at the sound and gasp myself. All the guards are still stationed at their posts, their clothes at their feet in a heap, their eyes straight ahead, and hands over their privates. I look at Abbie, who is fully clothed, gripping Gannon’s arm tightly, looking like she wants to run back into the room.

“Ready, My Queen?” Liam laughs, looping his arm back through mine.

I nod, my breathing heavy and stare straight ahead before I start walking. I head for the king’s quarters, and I can hear Abbie crying behind me as she follows Gannon. Every staff member lines the halls naked, eyes straight ahead, thankfully. My chest warms, knowing they did this for her. Kyson growls through the bond angrily, and I can almost see the look of anger on his face.

As we stroll through the halls, I feel a strange weight lift from not only Abbie but also me as her crying stops. Each person we pass bows or nods, and she loops her arm through mine. She rests her head on my

shoulder as we climb the last set of stairs to find Clarice and Dustin standing up top, also naked.

“I knew you were a fine lady, Clarice, but damn,” Liam says, giving a whistle.

“Liam, you are not too big for me to spank or wash your mouth out with soap,” she scolds.

“Lucky me, which knee would you like me over?” he laughs, and she folds her arms across her chest, and her eyes narrow at the man.

“My Queen,” she says and nods. Dustin walks over and opens the door for me.

“Abbie?” I whisper.

“You didn’t have to do this,” she tells me, yet the tension in her body has left; she looks more relaxed.

“Yes, I did. You needed to see.”

She looks out at all the naked guards and staff. “Did you have to make them do it, too?”

“No one made them do it, love,” Gannon whispers, and everyone in the hall bows or tips their heads to her, and her cheeks flush pink.

“So, can I take you somewhere now and put some pants on? It is a little chilly.” Gannon asks, and I give her a nudge.

“Go, no one cares what you look like,” I tell her, and tears brim in her eyes as she hugs me.

“More than my life,” she whispers.

“More than my life,” I tell her.

“More than my life,” all the guards and staff murmur in unison, making my heart skip a beat.

I look at Dustin, who nods, keeping his eyes on mine. I wait for Abbie to disappear around the corner near the stairs before racing to the cupboard for clothes. Clarice steps into the room as I pull on some pajamas, and I let out a breath.

“You’re a good friend,” Clarice says, wrapping a sheet around herself.

“I can’t believe everyone did it for her,” I chuckle. Clarice also laughs.

“Yes, but also you, you are our queen. Where you go, we follow, even if it is doing something as silly as being naked,” she says when Kyson’s voice booms through the link.

‘For goddess sake, please tell me she has clothes on now,’ he growls.

‘I have clothes on,’ I tell him, and he growls and goes to say something, but I cut him off.

‘I will deal with you when you get home,’ I say.

‘With me? You better run when I get home,’ he snarls.

‘Good, I will do it naked,’ I tell him, and he growls, but I shove him out of my head.

“He is a little angry,” I sigh, turning to Clarice.

“Don’t worry, My Queen, you have an entire castle to back you,” she says, and I furrow my brows, remembering how I was able to override the commands of Kyson.

“How?” I ask her.

“How what?” Clarice asks.

“They all listened, Kyson commanded them, and they listened to me instead.”

“Ah, now that is something you need to ask your king about, My Queen,” she chuckles before strolling out. I sigh and sit on the bed. Now, I have to deal with my king when he comes home.

The day passes by quickly. A doctor comes by to take blood. I work on my reading with Liam and Dustin. At first, I am a little embarrassed by my earlier spectacle, but as I walk the halls, it is like it never happened; everyone is completely normal despite all of us being naked this morning.

After dinner, I go to bed. I can feel Kyson’s burning anger dissipate; he almost seems giddy and excited to get home. I find this odd and wonder what made his mood switch so fast. His anger is still there, but it has dissipated unusually fast, knowing Kyson.

Crawling into the comforting embrace of my den, I meticulously rearrange the edges of my makeshift bedding, twisting and turning them in a futile attempt to find a fragment of comfort. My weary eyes flicker open at the sound of the door creaking open, alerting me to Kyson’s arrival.

I sit up, waiting for his wrath, having decided I am too tired to argue with him, so I will just listen to his ranting if it means I can sleep.

Kyson's entrance is accompanied by an unusual silence. He strides toward me with purpose, his jacket slipping effortlessly from his broad shoulders and landing nonchalantly at the foot of the bed. His piercing gaze bore into mine, devoid of its usual fiery intensity, as he methodically unfastens his cufflinks and places them delicately on the bedside table. He starts unbuttoning his shirt, one by one, and I stare at his sculpted chest. A heady wave of his intoxicating scent envelops the room, triggering an involuntary purr to escape my lips. Kyson's smirk deepens as he witnesses my internal struggle against the urge to surrender myself to him completely.

"You are in trouble," he declares, his voice laced with a mixture of authority and restraint. My heart skips a beat, anticipating the reprimand hanging in the air like an unspoken threat.

"But I think I can forgive you," he adds.

"You think, or you have?" I ask, forcing myself to remain where I am. I want to bite him, taste his skin and inhale his scent like a damn animal. It infuriates me, yet my mouth waters all the same. Kyson raises an eyebrow at me before taking his shirt off and offering it to me; I reach out for it, wondering what he is playing at. He lets me take it before walking off into the bathroom.

The sound of running water fills the silence, amplifying the weight of his unspoken thoughts. "Kyson?" I call out, my voice tinged with a mixture of confusion and concern.



“My Queen,” he says in return, making me purse my lips at his weird behavior. When he finishes showering, he saunters out and tugs the duvet back I am huddled under.

“You didn’t eat all your dinner,” he growls, reaching for me.

As his touch graces my skin, a delightful tingle courses through me, his warmth seeping into my very core as he cradles me against him.

“I wasn’t hungry,” I tell him, nipping at his chest; he lets me brush his fingers through my hair as the calling slips out of him.

“I thought you were angry?” I ask.

“I am,” he answers, and I sit up, straddling his waist.

“You don’t seem angry?” I tell him.

“Clarice said you didn’t eat your lunch either?” Kyson growls, his fingers tangling in my hair; he tugs me back down and pulls my head back before brushing his lips against mine gently.

“What does it matter whether I eat or not? Did you discover anything about the murdered rogues?” I inquire, my eyes rolling in exasperation as I attempt to push away from his chest. However, Kyson’s firm hold prevents any escape, drawing me back into his embrace. His lips feather

across mine with a tenderness that belies the lingering anger between us.

“Because, my love,” he purrs, his voice laced with a mix of possessiveness and concern. “You’re eating for two.” And with those words, his tongue invades my mouth.

