

## Chapter 103

~MAYA~

I spot Kane then. It's hard not to. He looks beautiful. He is dressed in all black and looks just as dazzling as he always does. He is holding hands with Maya or the fake Maya; I'm not sure what to call her anymore. They look good together, like a couple made for each other. There was just one thing wrong with the picture; he seemed to be unhappy. Kane couldn't hide the misery from his face. I don't think he even wanted to be here today from his expression. I glance at Gabriella, who is giving me the look. She's reminding me of what I need to do.

I had to keep my eyes on anyone but him. I couldn't give him any kind of attention. Kane needed to believe that I was finally moving on without him. He needed to realize that we were mates. And I couldn't do that for him. He had to know it on his own. I couldn't let him see me looking at him. So far, it doesn't look like he's spotted me yet. He's talking to Maya; she's saying something to him. Unlike him, she seems delighted to be here.

I turn away from them and hug Lucy before kissing Roman on his cheek. I loved how he always looked happy whenever he saw me. It warmed my heart every single time. I touch his little fingers and give his hand a soft kiss. And I absolutely love the way Lucy dressed him for the wedding. He looked like a handsome prince. A baby prince.

"How beautiful is this place?" Lucy asks us.

"It is beautiful," Isabella says. "But a little too big for my liking. It doesn't feel like home. Anyone could get lost. You will need a car to get from one part of the house to the next."

"That's because it isn't your home." Eden teases her sister, who in turn rolls her eyes.

"Did anyone see Lucas?" Lucy asks. "I'm hoping that they got invitations to the wedding. I don't want to see Gideon, but I want to see everyone else. Especially him. I miss him so much. We all do. And I think that Maya will be overjoyed when she finally sees him after so long."

"If they received invitations, I'm sure he will be here," Austin says. "He knows that we found Maya. I'm sure that it has been eating him inside, not being able to see her for himself. This will be the perfect opportunity."

Everyone looked excited at the possibility of seeing Lucas. They've mentioned him a few times. And everyone seemed to love him plenty. He must be a wonderful person for their eyes to light up how they did whenever he was mentioned.

"Shall we go inside?" Isabella asks. "If we stay here talking, we will never make it in time for the wedding."

She was right. We would never make it inside if we kept on talking. There were always so many things to discuss when everyone met up.

I know precisely when Kane's eyes fall on me, I could feel my skin tingle without looking in his direction. A part of me thinks that he's been trying hard this entire time not to look at me, but it would seem that he had just failed.

My skin felt hot under his gaze. It seemed like this would be a lot harder than I thought it would be. I was dying to look his way, but I knew I couldn't do it. I knew that I had to be strong around him just once. This was necessary for our future. If there was ever going to be one for us.

"Can we stop at the washroom before we go in?" I ask Gabriella. She sees the look in my eyes; I think she knows I'm begging for help. Gabriella was good at reading my expressions, and I'm grateful for that. I can't imagine having to tell her in front of everyone why I needed to get away from here.

"We will join the rest of you in a few minutes," Gabriella excuses both of us. "We're taking a trip to the bathroom. I blame being pregnant."

She doesn't say anything else as she pulls me forward.

"I saw him looking at you." She tells me as we near the mansion. "Our plan is already working. I think he's concerned that you aren't looking his way. And I think he loves that dress on you."

I can't help but blush, "I did feel his eyes on me. Thank you for getting me out of there. I didn't think it would be this hard to ignore him. I've never done it before. I'm so used to doing the opposite."

"Can I help you?" A kind lady asks you at the entrance.

She must be one of their workers. Even the maids were dressed in expensive clothes. I don't think there was a single person here that didn't stand out. They made sure that everyone was up to their standard.

"Yes, we're looking for the bathroom," Gabriella tells her. "Can you please point us in the direction? We don't want to be late for the wedding ceremony."

She nods and shows us where to go. There was a screen to the left of us where we had to type the word bathroom, and we were shown all the different options throughout the mansion.

"Do you think Arthur's family was also responsible for installing this?" I ask Gabriella.

I didn't know much about his family, but their family business sounds like a cool one. Imagine being able to create things this fantastic?

She shrugs her shoulders, "I think it's possible. They're good at those things."

Gabriella seems to distance herself at the mention of his family. She must have had a bad experience with them to react this way. What did Arthur's father do to her for her to be this way?

We continue walking in silence.

There are many portraits hung on the walls. There was even a painting with the Fawns. I didn't stop and look at it, but it seemed like there were many more siblings that I hadn't met before. Everything in this house was pleasing to the eyes; it's insane how expensive everything looked.

"Tell me why we are heading to the bathroom when it's clear that neither of us needs to use it," Gabriella says to me. "I don't think we stopped to think about that small detail."

I bite my lips to keep from laughing. She was right. Using the bathroom was just an excuse to get away from Kane. It was an opportunity for me to get enough time to compose myself once more. But here we were, heading to the nearest bathroom.

"Is that a spa room?" I ask as my jaw drops. The door was open, unlike the other entries we'd just passed earlier.

Gabriella grabs my hand and pulls me into the room without warning, "there is only one way for us to find that out."

"What are you doing?" I whisper as she shuts the door behind us.

"When will we ever get another opportunity to check out the spa room in this unbelievable mansion?" She asks me. "We have time to waste since everyone thinks we excused ourselves to use the washroom."

I shook my head at her as I took a look around me. There was a sauna, amongst many other things.

"I think they even give facials in here." She tells me as she points at the monitor.

Even the spa room was a sight to see. It was bigger than any of the rooms I've stayed in before. I couldn't imagine what their bedrooms would be like.

The doorknob turns, and Gabriella and I freeze. It takes us a moment to compose ourselves, and we rush to hide under a table. We weren't exactly doing anything wrong, but I can't imagine how it would look if anyone found us inside here when we knew how to find the bathroom.

I watch as two persons walk inside and lock themselves in. One was a man and the other a woman. I could tell by their shoes. The man seemed to be in a rich white suit while the woman wore a white dress. I couldn't see their faces from this angle. Isn't it supposed to be wrong to wear a white dress to a wedding? Unless this was the bride, that didn't look like a wedding dress, it was a beautiful dress but not one I would expect a bride to be wearing.

"Please don't cry," the man whispers.

I can't believe Gabriella got me stuck in such an awkward situation. We should have never gotten ourselves stuck in this damn spa room. Now we had to listen to this private conversation, and there was nowhere for us to escape. As far as I knew, there was only one door, and it was behind both strangers.

"How can I not cry, Atticus?" The woman cries.

At his name, Gabriella and I gave each other alarmed looks. This was the groom that was supposed to be married in less than an hour. What was he doing inside here asking another woman not to cry?

"I tried every way possible to get out of this wedding," He tells her. "There is nothing else that I can do to stop it. It's too late now. There are too many people here today to walk out. You know that just as much as I do. If I walk out today, my parents will lose faith in me. I can't do that to my family. We've worked too hard to get to this point."

"I understand that!" She hissed. "But you're my mate! And you're marrying my best friend. I can't believe she didn't think once to try and stop this wedding. How can I see the people I love so much get married? I'm hurting. You're supposed to keep me happy. You promised me that. If it was Damon or Dante, I'm sure they would have found a way to get out of this wedding for me. But you're not trying hard enough."

"Why would you bring up my brothers?" He growls. "You already know how hard it's been for me to share you with them. It kills me every day to know that you belong to them just as much as you belong to me. I know you're hurting, but you don't have to throw salt on my wounds."

"Just answer me one thing." She tells him.

"What is that?"

"Is this the end for us?" She cries. "Will you forget about me after you marry her? I don't want to lose you. I love you, Atticus. I don't want Autumn to know you the way that I do. I don't want you to touch her. I don't want you to care for her. I don't want you to even look at her the way you look at me."

Gabriella and I are as quiet as we can be as we wait for his response. There is a sharp intake of breath, and I'm sure it was his.

How can she ask him these things when he is getting married today? In less than a damn hour! But who am I to talk to after all the time I spent with Kane, even after knowing he was in love with Maya? It doesn't make me any better than she is. Even now, I'm trying to get Kane to realize our connection.

"These are promises that I can't make you, Anya." He says to her. It wasn't the response I was expecting from him. "Autumn will be my wife from today. At the same time, I could never love her as I love you. I can't mistreat her either. You will always come first; you know that. I'm not sure what will happen after today, but I can promise that I will never look at her the way I look at you. We are mates; I can't look at another woman like I do you. But right now, sweetheart, I can't tell you I won't care for her. After today, I have responsibilities toward her, and I won't be able to ignore all of them. If you want me not to touch her, you know that certain traditions will require me to touch her; I can promise not to take her to bed, to not sleep with her. That's the most I can do for you, my mate. I'm sorry for failing you like this. I'm so sorry."

Anya is crying more than ever now; I can hear it in her voice. "Why have you always been the perfect one? Why did I have to lose you? Why did it have to be you?"

Before he can answer her, the door flies open, and I can see that it's a woman—a woman wearing a wedding dress.

Gabriella covers my mouth to prevent me from gasping. That was no doubt, Autumn. His soon-to-be wife. This couldn't get any worse, could it?

How did we get stuck in such a situation? I'm sure Arthur and everyone else was probably worried about us by now. We were supposed to use the bathroom or pretend to use it and then return by their side. Instead, we're stuck here listening to something we shouldn't have heard. Not like this.

It felt personal and like trouble.

"I shouldn't be surprised, should I?" Autumn asks the both of them. There is no hiding the pain in her voice. Does Autumn have feelings for Atticus as well? Even though this was an arranged marriage, something about the way she spoke told me that Anya wasn't the only one that liked him.

"Autumn," Anya whispers. "You know that I love him. Can't you stop this wedding? He is my mate. You know more than anyone else what my feelings are for him. I can't just ignore him after this wedding and pretend like there was never anything between us. And you know he loves only me. He will always only love me. Do you get that? You can never be happy with a man that loves another woman. Especially not when that woman is your best friend."

Autumn is silent for a few minutes, and in those minutes, I try to be as quiet as possible. If we made any sound, they would know they weren't alone inside this room. She sighs before saying, "Is that what you want? For me to find a way to destroy this wedding and destroy the relationship between our families? Should I tell my father what the two of you are doing less than an hour before the wedding? Would that be something both of you would like me to do?"

I assume that she's speaking to Atticus. Who is unusually silent. I wish I could see their expressions.

There is obvious hurt in her voice as she asks those questions. I definitely think she has feelings for him. But it doesn't seem like he likes her; he only seems to love Anya. And that was expected since Anya was his mate. He wouldn't be able to even look her way because of his strong feelings for her best friend. I felt sorry for her. She doesn't seem like a bad person. How hard must this be?

"Anya," Atticus says. "Can you please leave us alone?"

I'm surprised that she's the one he asks to leave. I thought he would want to keep his mate by his side.

She goes to protest, but he cuts her off, "please, Anya. I need to speak to Autumn alone."

I don't hear anything except his heels pounding against the floor as she storms off, slamming the door behind her. If she wasn't pissed with him before, she definitely was now that he'd sent her away.

He exhales loudly as soon as she leaves. And I'm not sure what he's going to say. Will he ask Autumn to tell her father to stop the wedding? I didn't think her father would listen with the number of people I've seen present here today.

"It's bad luck to see the bride in her wedding dress before the ceremony." Those are the first words that Atticus has said to her since Anya left. And once more, I'm surprised by this man. He's unusually calm for someone going through so much on his wedding day.

"What are we doing, Atticus?" She asks him. "You don't love me. You love my best friend. She loves you along with your two broturs. This marriage will be a burden on both of you."

"And it won't be a burden on you?" He asks her.

She is quiet, and I don't think she's willing to answer his question.

"I asked you a question. Do you want me to cause a scene? Do you want me to find a way to stop this wedding? This is your last chance."

He steps closer to her, and I think I heard her tiny gasp. "Our worlds don't revolve around us. We don't do things for our benefit. Our families didn't get to where they are today by making rash decisions. Every move is well calculated and executed in a way that would benefit us. I will not ask you to turn against your family for me. Anya asked you to do it, but she isn't thinking straight. This wedding will happen today whether we like it or not because this is the right thing to do for our families. And us Fawns always put family first above everything else. Nothing will ever change that. And I think it's the same for you. Is it not?"

Autumn is quiet once more. I think even she is shocked by his response.

"Are there any other questions you would like to ask me before we get married, Autumn?" he asks her.

I assume that her response was no because he suddenly storms out of the room, leaving her behind alone.

Now it was just her turn to leave so we could get out of this room. I think that the look on Gabriella's face told me that she was thinking the same thing as I was.

I'm surprised when she drops herself onto the ground and buries her face in her hands. Is she crying? She seemed strong and unbothered just a few seconds ago speaking to Atticus. Was this how she truly felt? Now that she thought she was alone, she showed genuine emotions.

"Why did it have to be you, Atticus?" She cries. "Why did it have to be you?"

She finally raises her head, and both Gabriella and I freeze when her eyes connect with ours. It's the last place we were expecting her to look.

Crap. We were in big trouble now. Gabriella gives me an apologetic smile, and I can't help but sigh. How did we get out of this mess now?

"Please don't scream!" I say to her. Her eyes were wide as we both got out of our hiding spots. I knew how bad this would look to anyone now meeting us. She didn't know either of us, yet we'd just heard her most private conversation with her future husband. That was our fault. I am sure that I will never be following Gabriella into a room ever again after today.

"This isn't as bad as it looks," Gabriella explains. "I got a glimpse of the spa and wanted a better look at it. Then Atticus and Anya barged in, and we didn't know what to do, so we hid since we weren't supposed to be inside. We promise to you that we were only looking for the bathroom, and then all of this happened. We got stuck in here. And we didn't mean to listen to your conversation."

She slowly calms down after hearing our explanations. I think she can see that we weren't trying to harm her or cause trouble. At least, I hoped that was the case. As far as she knew, she could call guards and have us removed from the wedding. Won't that be something interesting to see?

"I'm sorry you had to see me like this before the wedding." She apologizes. "This must not be a very good first impression."

"Are you kidding me?" Gabriella asks. "Look at the both of us. We aren't exactly giving off the best first impression. I'm Gabriella, by the way."

"Nice to meet you, Gabriella. I assume you know I'm Autumn by now."

"We know," I answer. "I don't have a name to give you; that's a long story on its own. But it's a pleasure to meet you, Autumn."

She nods, "I would love to stay and chat, but I have a wedding to return to. There isn't going to be a wedding if the bride is missing."

I smile, "we understand. We will be cheering for you in the crowd. And you look absolutely beautiful."

"You sure do," Gabriella says. "Everyone will be looking at you in awe, including us."

She smiles, thanks us one more time, and finally leaves us.

"Let's get out of here before anyone else comes in and traps us inside," Gabriella suggests.

She didn't have to tell me twice. We were out of there before anyone else could join us.

"I'm assuming what we just witnessed shouldn't be said to anyone else?" I ask.

She nods, "I'll tell Arthur about it later, but no one else. I think we already knew this was happening after what happened the first time we met the Fawn brothers. I just didn't think that we would end up in the middle of everything."

We hurry out of the room and stand out a few guests to find the others. While there were many guests surrounding us, it wasn't hard to find our people. They would follow out in any crowd. Lucy was the first one we saw. The rest of them were a little distance away but close enough for us to see them.

"There you two are!" Lucy says as she spots us. "Arthur is going crazy thinking something happened. I had to force him to let me come get you while he stayed back with Emma."

"It's a good thing we didn't take any longer in that room," Gabriella says. "He might have caused a scene by the time we returned."

She was right. Imagine what would have happened if Arthur had barged in while Atticus, Anya, and Autumn were all in the same room with us?

As soon as we join the others, Arthur attacks Gabriella with questions about why she took so long. She had to explain that she was told by him about it after the wedding. We couldn't risk anyone else hearing what we heard. We could trust everyone here, well, not exactly everyone. We couldn't trust the fake Maya. I'm surprised that she hasn't caused any real damage yet. We had to expose her before she tried anything crazy.

"While you were gone, I was able to find a few men interested in getting to know you better," Arthur says loud enough for Kane to hear.

Looking at me, I knew because he immediately looks at me. This time, I didn't get a chance to look away before I caught him looking at her. The yearning in his eyes almost makes me forget about everything else, but then I remember that I had to do this. I had to act like I didn't care about him anymore if I wanted this plan to work. And I did want it to work.

Looking away from him was one of the hardest things I'd ever had to do.

"I'm looking forward to meeting each of those men." I finally respond.

It was time to give Kane a taste of his own medicine. Maybe then and only then would he realize who I was to him.