

Chapter 86

~MAYA~

I couldn't stop thinking about everything Gabriella spoke to me about yesterday. She said that Kane was jealous that I was dancing with other men, and he'd purposefully glared at that one guy who tried to dance with me while I was still in his arms. A part of me wanted to believe it was true. But I knew he'd only done that for my sake. He knew that I was uncomfortable and was only trying to make it better for me.

She had also asked me if Kane had ever protected anyone else as desperately as he'd done for me. And I had answered her honestly. I've never seen him get worked up over anyone else but Maya.

So then why did he also get worried over me? I've denied it all along, thinking he was doing it only because of everything he'd gone through with his mate. But not that she was back, I had to double-check everything that I've thought I knew about the way he reacted around me.

Gabriella has definitely given me something to think about. It's been on my mind since yesterday. I could barely sleep because of it.

"Lucy has organized a picnic for us," she informs me suddenly, bringing my attention back to her.

We were in her room; I was helping her sort out her closet. She also wanted to share some of her clothes with me since I didn't own a single thing. Everything that I've worn so far was because she was kind enough to give it to me.

I'm super grateful for everything she's done for me since the first time we met. Gabriella indeed was one of a kind.

"I'm not sure it's a good idea to attend," I tell her. "After everything you pointed out to me yesterday, I think that it's best Kane and I kept our distance from each other to avoid any problems for the people around us."

Gabriella sighs and pulls a dress out of her closet and hands it to me, "I know that you not going may be the most logical thing to do, but I want you there. I don't want you to miss out on some fun because of this thing with Kane. Hopefully, it will pass. Plus the picnic is right next to a lake. It will give us a chance to swim and relax our minds. I think all of us need some fun."

Emma walks in then and gives me a sweet smile. I can't get over how adorable she is.

"Do you want to come with us?" Gabriella asks her. "She hates going to any events." She explains to me.

"I think it will be fun!" I try to encourage her. "We can swim together! Or shall I say instead, we can learn to swim together since I don't know how to. And I also almost drowned once."

"What do you say, Emma?" Gabriella asks her. "You can learn to swim with her."

Emma smiles and agrees, totally shocking Gabriella.

When she leaves the room, she hugs me, "thank you for that. I've been trying to get her to go places with me for some time now. It's the first time she's agreed."

"I didn't do anything except admit that I can't swim." I laugh.

"Put this on under your dress," Gabriella tells me as she throws a white bikini onto the bed.

My cheeks turn red, "I'm expected to wear that in front of everyone?"

She nods, "I know we're both pregnant, but our tummies aren't that big. We can pull it off."

"I don't mean that. Wouldn't it be awkward in front of everyone?" I ask her.

"I don't think so. You'll only have to wear it in the lake. You can change right after." She points out.

I finally give in and do as she says. I'll have to unzip the dress when it's time to get into the lake. Hopefully, everyone else in their swimwear will make it less awkward for me.

It didn't take long for us to pack everything we needed for the picnic and get into the vehicle. I'm incredibly nervous about seeing Kane again. Now that both Gabriella and Arthur knew how I felt about him, I had to be extra careful of showing my emotions around them. Yesterday was proof that Gabriella would interrupt us if we did anything stupid. And I think that was exactly what we needed. We always did things that could land us both in trouble. But like I've said before, it was never intentional. We got lost in each other. To be fair, I couldn't speak for the both of us; I knew that I got lost in him; I'm not sure what went on in his head whenever we were near each other. All I knew was that, at times, it did seem like he wanted it as much as I did. I always thought it was because I reminded him of Maya. But Maya was back now, and like Gabriella pointed out, he does seem to have some interest in me still.

"Now, girls, I hope we can all behave ourselves today," Arthur says in a fatherly tone to all of us in the back seat.

"Sometimes I think he forgets I'm his mate and not his child." Gabriella snorts.

"I'll be on my best behavior, dad!" Emma says, and I'm sure I heard Gabriella gasp. Even Arthur looks shocked in the front seat. He looks at Gabriella through the mirror, and I can see the warm smile he gives her.

"It's the first time she's called him dad." She whispers to me.

Oh, that was wonderful. I was happy to be a part of this special moment for them both. Emma was such a sweet little girl. She seemed so friendly and kind. I can see why they decided to adopt her, and from what I could see, she was happy to be a part of their little family. She loved them just as much as they loved her. They were all lucky to have each other.

I held my breath as we pulled up to the lake. Thankfully, it was just us here. Kane and the rest of them hadn't reached as yet.

"For once, we're early to something," Arthur says as he grabs the basket from the front seat and exits the vehicle.

Gabriella takes the cloth and spreads it so that we can have a seat while enjoying the beauty of the lake. It didn't even last a few minutes before we heard a sound.

"They're here!" Gabriella informs us.

I look on as two vehicles pull up next to Arthur's. My breath gets stuck in my throat when Kane jumps out of the jeep with nothing but shorts on. He's completely shirtless, and I can't help but stare. How am I supposed to look away from a tempting view like that?

"You're practically drooling," Gabriella warns me.

I'm grateful for her reminder that I'm supposed to behave myself today. But it shouldn't be so wrong to stare when no one was even paying attention to me.

Kane isn't the only one, the rest of the guys are also bareback, and they all looked good. Still, none compared to Kane. I would think it was a crime to cover a body like that with clothes.

Maya walks out in one of the tiniest bikinis I've ever seen; it barely covers anything. She clearly doesn't feel awkward like I did.

The rest of the girls are in dresses like Gabriella and me. I assume they will also change when it's time to go into the water.

"Emma!" Lucy says as she hugs her. "I'm happy you decided to join us today."

"Hi, Auntie Lucy." She greets her.

"Austin!" she calls to her mate. "Do we have some snacks for her? Bring whatever we have."

"You don't have to do that," Gabriella tells her. "Arthur already drowns her with snacks any chance that he can get."

"How are you feeling?" Lucy asks Gabriella as Austin walks over with a basket full of snacks alone. He hands it to her, and she gives it to Emma, ignoring what Gabriella told her a minute ago.

Emma doesn't refuse as she happily takes it from her.

Gabriella looks at me; we both know she lied so that we could get home earlier last night, "I'm much better today, Lucy. Thanks for asking."

Everyone is suddenly distracted when Isabella walks in with baby Roman in her arms. He's the cutest baby I've ever seen. I won't expect anything less since his parents were Lucy and Austin.

"Ugh," Isabella whispers. "I never want him to grow up. He should stay this little forever. I love these baby toes and fingers."

"Do you want to hold him?" Lucy asks Maya. "He hasn't gotten a chance to be held by his auntie Maya. I'm sure he will love it."

Maya looks skeptical, but she eventually gives in when Austin persists. He obviously wanted his sister to hold his child.

Isabella gives her the baby, and something unusual happens. Baby Roman begins to squeal at the top of his lungs as though someone is harming him. Maya tries to calm him down, but he doesn't want to stop crying.

Lucy walks over to them and takes him into her arms, "that's weird. He usually loves when anyone holds him. Maybe he's hungry."

She tries to feed him a bottle, but he doesn't want it. The crying has definitely eased up, however.

Lucy sees me looking at him, and she smiles, "do you want to hold him for a second?"

I can't hide my excitement as I reach for him; something about this baby makes my heart melt. I felt so much love for him without spending any time with him at all.

I'm worried that he will start to cry as he did with Maya, but I'm pleasantly surprised when he nestles against my chest. He looks happy as he stares into my eyes.

"Hi, sweet baby," I whisper. "You're so handsome. I love your little dimple."

He has a dimple on the left side of his cheek, and it shows more when he gives the cutest smile I've ever seen.

I gasp when he grabs onto my baby finger, gripping it tightly.

"He's so strong for a baby," I whisper to Lucy. I don't want to be loud; I'm afraid I'll startle him.

"He likes you," Austin says as he joins me in staring at him. Having Austin next to me while we stared at his baby did something to me. I felt happier than I've ever felt in a long while. It felt like I was doing something I should have done since a long time now.

I don't know what causes me to feel like this, but I wanted to hold onto this feeling for as long as I could. Austin looks very happy, and his happiness made me feel a sense of satisfaction.

Austin catches me looking at him, and he frowns suddenly; he looks at Maya and then back at me. It was an awkward situation for a few seconds before he dismissed whatever he was thinking.

I lean over and kiss Roman on his forehead as he falls asleep before handing him back to Lucy.

She places him into his stroller and joins us on the ground.

I try my best not to look at Kane, who's looking at the lake with Hunter. Even from the back, he's a sight to see. I spot Gabriella looking at me, and I quickly look away. I can't get away from her; she watches me like a hawk. I don't blame her; she knows how much drama will occur if anyone sees how I stare at Kane. Maya already didn't like me; I didn't need a reason for everyone else to dislike me.

"Do you guys want to go for a swim now?" Lucy asks us. "I think I should go in before Roman wakes up."

"I'm up for it," Isabella says. "I'm starting to feel sweaty in all these clothes."

"I'm joining you," Hunter says. "I'm not risking you going into a lake while you're pregnant alone."

She smiles, "we both know whether I was pregnant or not, you would be coming with me." She teases him.

"Is Emma not joining us?" I ask Arthur.

He shakes his head, "she already fell asleep. I just placed her in the vehicle. Hopefully, she wakes up soon to join in on the fun."

Gabriella helps me unzip my dress, and I do that for her as well. The men are already waiting for their mates to join them. I don't think any of them trusted their mates enough to leave them in the water by themselves. And I've already learned that all of these men were very overprotective when it came to the women they were in love with.

My body shivers as the wind picks up. I felt naked in this bikini. At least I wasn't the only one.

I take a step forward with Gabriella by my side, and it's only then that I notice Kane leaned up against a tree, looking straight at me. His eyes are heated, and there is so much longing there that I felt almost pressured to walk toward him. I swallowed the feeling, afraid that I would do just that. Whenever I felt like running to him, my feet compelled me to do it. Not this time. Too many people were watching us.

My body felt like it had just awakened from a long nap, happy that it was getting the attention of the one man it wanted more than anything else.

Gabriella takes my hand in hers, "do I need to remind you of what we spoke about yesterday?" she asks me.

I quickly force my eyes away from Kane with a blush on my cheeks. If I'd known that wearing something like this would have gotten him to look at me with such an intense hunger, I would have worn it sooner than this. I hate that I just admitted that to myself, but it was the truth.

We're about to get into the water when Kane approaches us. My body immediately shivered from his closeness.

"She shouldn't be in there alone without an aid." He says, surprising me. "She doesn't know how to swim."

By now, all eyes are on us.

Maya walks toward him upon hearing his words, "how do you know that, Kane?"

