

Chapter 96

"Is this about what happened in the garden?" I ask him, my hands are trembling, and my heart pounding in my chest makes it hard to hear myself. "Lucy already explained that she lent me Maya's dress. It would explain why you got mixed up with both of us. I can't think of a better explanation than this. It's nothing for you to be this worked up over."

Again, I'm trying to make it better for him. I want to make things easier, not harder. I want Kane to be okay. I want him to stop hating himself, and I am trying my hardest to make that happen.

He doesn't look convinced by my words. Instead, he seems a bit more frustrated by it. I'm not surprised. Kane never listened. If he was already convinced that he was at fault for what happened, he was sticking with it. Nothing I can do or say would ever be able to change his mind.

He exhales, "it's not just the dress. Her scent should have been stronger than a damn dress. I've breathed her in before; I know what she smells like. I've dreamt of it, tasted it. Maya's scent is locked in my memories. No one can ever take it from me. Lucy said that for my benefit, but everyone knows that I'm f*****g weak. I can't even find my mate in a simple game. I was the only one. I was the only man who couldn't pick his mate out of a few women. It was not supposed to be a challenge, but it was for me, and I failed miserably. It doesn't just stop with the game. You always confuse me. Everything about you reminds me of Maya, the Maya I knew and fell in love with. How is that even possible? I thought that when I finally found Maya, everything would change. But look at me now. I'm worse now that she's here. It makes no f*****g sense to me. You make no f*****g sense to me. Everything about you it's like a puzzle that I can't seem to figure out. For once, I want to understand you. I want to understand why I'm so conflicted whenever it involves you—a woman with no name."

I bite my lip and try to control my racing heart. I'm not sure what he's trying to say to me. What was his purpose behind telling me these things? How should I react to them?

"I don't know what to tell you, Kane," I whisper. "We know I'm not Maya, so it makes no sense why I remind you so much of her. Something must be wrong. I'm just as confused as you are. I wish things weren't this way. All I wanted was for you to be happy, and just like you, I thought that you would be happy when Maya was back in your life. It seems that we were both wrong about this. You look the most miserable now that Maya is back in your life. I don't think anyone else, but you can answer the questions in your heart. Only you will be able to explain why you're feeling this way. No one else."

I want to tell him that I believe that Maya is under a spell or possibly an imposter, but I know that he isn't likely to believe me without proof. And I already agreed to keep this between Gabriella and me. The only other person that knew was Arthur. And we had to keep it that way until we had what we needed to prove our allegations.

I watched as he paced in front of me. Left to right. Something I was getting used to seeing. I can see the battle he's having within himself, the feelings he's trying hard to keep hidden. He's fighting to find the truth to these same feelings that he wants to hide, but I don't think that he's winning the fight.

My breath gets stuck in my throat when he finally turns and pins me with his intense gaze. I can't move. Not when he's looking at me like that. How does he do it? How does he make me freeze on the spot? Why does my heart flutter so much in his presence? I have just as many unanswered questions as he does. We're both screwed; it would seem. Messed up in our own bitter ways. We're both far from perfect.

My knees feel weak when his eyes scan the areas he left marks on my body. This isn't the first time today that he's done this. It's like he's memorized them all. I can almost tell what he's thinking, but I'm not prepared for when he opens his mouth to speak.

"Please tell me. Why the f**k am I so angry that you covered the marks I left on your body?" he demands in a pained whisper.

"Why do I want to see them? Why is it that I want to show them to everyone around us? I shouldn't be proud of them, but damn it, I f*****g am. I'm proud that I put them there, and I want to see them. It's killing me that I can't right now."

My body felt weak at his confession. I don't think Kane has ever been this honest with me, and I don't believe my heart can take it anymore. I had fallen hard for him without him saying things like this to me; how much more would I fall when he said words like this that made my heart feel like butter?

I don't move as he takes slow steps in my direction. I slightly tilt my chin when he stops a few inches away.

"Why did you cover it up?" He asks as his hand lightly traces the makeup over the mark. "I was looking forward to seeing them. I wanted to."

I place my hand over his still on my neck, "because we both know I couldn't just leave them there. Why are you here, Kane? What do you want to say to me? You know that you shouldn't be here. Not when everyone knows where to find me. I don't want to get you in any trouble. I want to keep you safe, even if that means keeping you safe from yourself."

It was true. As much as I loved having him here by my side, I knew that it was dangerous, especially for him. If he didn't want to keep himself safe, I would have to do it for him.

He groans, "I came to apologize to you. I'm sorry for what I did last night. I tried to stop myself, but I've been unable to control myself recently, especially around you. What happened last night should have never happened. You didn't deserve what I did to you. I even left you there still bleeding without a single apology or explanation for why I did that. I know that an apology isn't enough for what I did, but it's all I can do for now. Even I don't have an explanation for my unforgivable actions recently. But I hope that you will accept my apology."

Why doesn't he realize by now that he doesn't have to apologize for things like this? I'm always willing to do anything that could help make him happy or at least make his life easier than it was. Besides, the events of last night weren't exactly painful for me. It brought me so much pleasure that it was hard to control my own emotions. But I'm used to not being able to control my emotions around him. That wasn't new. He made my feelings turn upside down. Even now, he's doing the same to me without trying.

"Don't apologize. I'm always happy to give you whatever you want. I will always do anything that makes you happy. I've told you that countless times already." I explain once more. "And last night was not painful for me, Kane. It was anything but that."

I want to tell him how good it felt. I want to say to him that I wanted more than he gave. I want to tell him that I almost left my bed to come to find him so he could finish what he started. I wanted him to know that I was restless and craving him for the rest of my pathetic night in that room.

He looked stunned by my response even though I'd left out half of the things I wanted to say. The thing that seemed to shock him the most however, was when I explained to him that it was anything but painful for me. What could he possibly be thinking? I suddenly wished that I could read his mind.

He rubs a hand through his hair, "fuck." He hissed.

He's clearly not happy. I don't know what I said to upset him, but he's definitely displeased.

"Stop f*****g doing that," he growls. "Every time you offer yourself like that to me, it sends me closer to insanity. Because each time I want to take you up on that offer and when I know I can't, when I prevent my body from getting what it wants, all hell breaks loose inside of me—all control snaps. Do you even understand the kind of effect you have on me?"

Once again, he's managed to shock me with his honesty. Apparently, the honest side of Kane is more deadly than his usual restricted side. His words continue to pierce right through me.

I attempt to walk toward him, but I'm hurt when he turns away.

"This can't happen."

I'm not sure if he's speaking to himself or me, but I don't want to end this conversation like this. I want to help him because I know that he is in pain. I walk toward him, but he pulls away once more from me when I try to touch him. I watch him pull at his hair in frustration. I hate seeing him like this. I hate knowing that I'm the one that's doing this to him. Because of me, he's conflicted and doesn't know what to do. I wish I knew how to make this easier for both of us. But the truth remained that there were many things that neither of us understood. It felt like there were things that we didn't know. Things that were causing this reaction between us. It may haunt us for the rest of our lives if we can't figure out how to deal with it before time runs out on both of us. Before our feelings take control and swallow us whole. If that happened, I was sure things would be heated around us.

He slams his fist against the wall in anger; Kane's no doubt angry with no one but himself. "what's wrong with me? Why can't I stay the f**k away from you?"

Before I can say anything, he's already out of the room, slamming the door behind him. I try to find my breath. I didn't realize that I was even holding it in.

I don't see Kane again after that. I'm not sure if he left the palace or if he was locked up in his room. Either way, the doctor saw me and confirmed that everything was okay. Lucy and everyone else was pleased with his report and allowed me to leave without kicking a fuss again. I was glad for the escape. Things were too crazy in just one day. I don't think either Kane or me would be able to survive another day around each other. It was better for the both of us that I was leaving. I sigh as I watch the palace become tiny the further we drove away from it. I was on my way back home with Gabriella and Arthur. I don't think I'm the only relieved one amongst us. They weren't saying a word, and I could tell that they were caught up in their thoughts. I can't tell if it's about me or Kane or us both.

Gabriella was the first to break the silence, "I can't believe Kane skipped Maya and went straight to you."

I was surprised it had taken her this long to bring up this conversation. I knew she was probably just as bothered about it as I was. Kane was right. He should have been able to sense Maya even though I was wearing her dress. How much of her scent could have even been on that dress? There was no way that's the only reason he was able to choose me over her.

"He said something troubling to me," I confess. "After I went to my room, he followed me. He said that I smelled more like Maya than Maya did."

"That doesn't make any sense," Arthur says.

"No, it doesn't." Gabriella agrees. "So there is definitely something wrong."

"There is one thing I can think of that could explain what's happening to him," Arthur says suddenly. "It's possible that you are also his mate."

There was an awkward pause as I tried to make sense of his words. A possibility that I was also Kane's mate? I wasn't sure that something like that could be possible.

"What?" Gabriella demands. "How is that logical? He bonded with Maya in the past. They marked each other. I've never heard of anything like that before. The only possible way I can see something like that taking place is if Maya is dead, and we can all see that she is still alive. She isn't acting like herself, but she's alive nevertheless."

Arthur looks at us through the rearview mirror, "we don't know for sure if she's alive."

"What are you trying to say?" I ask him.

He shrugs his shoulders, "from what I've seen so far, Kane has more of a connection with you than he has with the Maya back at the palace. There is no way that she is his mate, at least that's the way I see it. And if she isn't his mate, how can she be the real Maya? I have a theory that she may be an imposter, and the real Maya could be dead. If that is the case, it will make sense that he's gotten a second mate. Which will be you."

Gabriella sighs, "while that theory does make sense. It's hard to believe that she isn't the real Maya. It's easier to believe that she's under a spell and behaving weirdly because of it. However, your theory does seem to explain everything that's happening so far. It will make sense as to why Kane is so attracted to her. His full attention seems to be focused on her. It will also explain why he went for her blood and not Maya's."

"Went for her blood?" Arthur asks, confused. "What are you talking about? Did I miss something?"

Gabriella bites her lip, "did we forget to tell you? Kane barged into her room last night and had a bit too much fun, as in he couldn't seem to get enough of her blood. I was confused as to why he didn't go for Maya's blood since that would make the most sense. She would have willingly given her blood to him, and it would have solved the problem. Instead, he went into her room and took way more than he should have, judging by all the marks I saw on her body earlier."

"Marks?" Arthur asks.

"Yes, Arthur, marks, like the one I give you every time I feed on you." She explains.

"I didn't see any marks on her." He points out.

"That's because I helped cover it with makeup." She explains. "As I was saying before, he took too much from her. But that only means he lost control, and I think we both know that shows that he couldn't get enough of her. And that kind of reaction only happens between mates."

Was it possible that I was indeed his second chance mate? Was there a chance that the real Maya was dead and the woman in the palace was pretending to be her?"

"How do you feel around Kane?" Arthur asks me. "Do you ever feel like you don't want anyone else to have him?"

I blush at his question, "I think I do feel that way. At times I wish that Maya didn't exist even though I know it's wrong of me to wish for something like that after everything she's gone through."

Gabriella nods, "it does sound like she's his mate, doesn't it?"

Arthur nods, "I'm afraid that it does. If that's the case, none of this will be easy. We have a rough ride ahead for us. The attraction between them is only going to grow the more time they spend away from each other; they're going to crave each other the more they try to ignore their feelings."

It did sound exactly like what was happening to Kane and me. We kept trying to ignore or at least control our feelings, but the opposite of that always happens in return. We both snap and do things that could land us in serious trouble.

"Let's say that it's possible that Maya could be dead, and the woman in the palace is not her but an imposter," I say. "Then who could she be?"

"I would go with a safe guess and say she could be the same witch we were all looking for. She would have had plenty belongings of Maya that would easily allow her to be able to shapeshift into her. I've seen witches do that already as long as they were powerful enough and had what they needed to get the spell done." Arthur answers me. "And if that is true, Austin and his family are in danger. She could be plotting something against them, and since she's now living there, she has easy access to each of them."

"Shouldn't we warn them?" I ask.

"Without any proof?" he asks me. "I don't think you realize how stubborn Austin is. He will never believe that Maya is an imposter without some solid proof. If we try to tell him this and we have nothing to prove it, it will push him further away, giving us less of an opportunity to catch her before she can hurt anyone."

Arthur was right. I didn't realize my suggestion was wrong until he pointed out the obvious. Austin would never accept that Maya could be dead and that the woman living with them could be the witch they were searching for.

I'm about to mention something else when I realize something I should have earlier.

"Where are we going?" I ask Gabriella. We aren't heading toward the house. I knew that something was up; what I didn't understand was why no one had told me anything as yet.

"I think it's time we finally get the answers we needed about Kane being my brother." She tells me. "We're going to Alpha Eric's old home. As you said, I'm hoping we find what we need there to prove that Kane is my long-lost brother."

"Are you frightened of what his reaction will be like if you can prove that he is your brother to him?" I ask her.

She sighs, "I know that Kane is a bit stubborn, and he isn't likely about to be happy that he'd been lied to by the people closest to him. It would mean he was also wrong for defending them when Austin's family killed his supposed father and sister. But I do believe that he would realize soon enough that having me as a sister was a blessing in disguise. He will have no choice but to love me."

"You're pretty hard not to love. No one would know that better than I do." Arthur says to her from the front.

Gabriella blushes, "of course, you fell in love with me at first sight." She turns towards me and adds, "You should know that he was planning on marrying someone else when we first met. And he tried to push me away the entire time. So I know how it feels for you with Kane. I keep trying to pull you away; I'm trying to protect your heart. I'm unsure if I'm helping you or making it harder for you. Let's assume it's true that he is your mate. I think that I may be causing more damage than good. No one knows how hard it is to stay away from your mate as I do. I've suffered a lot trying to put distance between Arthur and me. When all of this is over, I'll take the time to sit down and tell you about Arthur and me. Our life before we were finally able to settle down and start a family together. It wasn't always like this. We had a rough time also."

I squeeze her hand, "I'll be happy to listen to the entire story."

"We're here," Arthur says to us suddenly.

Already? I bit my lip; we were so close to finding the truth. Gabriella looks at me, and I can see the uncertainty and hope in her eyes.

It was time.

Time to prove that Kane was indeed Gabriella's brother.